

Hawaii wildfire death toll hits 99, may double

Governor warns as rescuers scour incinerated landscape for more remains

AFP, Kahului

The death toll in Hawaii's wildfires rose to 99 and could double over the next 10 days, the state's governor said Monday, as emergency personnel painstakingly scoured the incinerated landscape for more human remains.

Last week's inferno on the island of Maui is already the deadliest US wildfire in a century, with only a quarter of the ruins of the devastated town of Lahaina searched for victims so far.

Governor Josh Green said more fatalities are certain, as emergency responders with cadaver dogs work their way through hundreds of homes and burned-out vehicles.

"There are 99 fatalities that are confirmed," he told a press conference Monday. Speaking to CNN earlier, Green warned that "over the course of the next 10 days, this number could double."

The historic coastal town of Lahaina was almost totally destroyed by the fast-moving blaze last week, with survivors saying there had been no warnings.

The intensity of the fire and scale of the destruction have made identification of

human remains difficult, with some corpses disintegrating as they are uncovered by searchers.

Only three of the 99 victims recovered so far could be identified by their fingerprints, said Maui Police Chief John Pelletier.

Police are encouraging those with missing relatives to give DNA samples that might speed up the process.

Around 25 percent of Lahaina had been searched, with that expected to rise to 90 percent by this weekend, said Pelletier.

Jeremy Greenberg, a Federal Emergency Management Agency director, said search conditions were "extraordinarily difficult to work through."

Officials warned of the dangers of unstable buildings and potential airborne toxic chemicals in the area, and said one arrest for trespassing had been made.

Until last week, the town was a bustling tourist hub, packed with shops and restaurants.

Now, "there's nothing to see except full devastation," said Green, who has visited the smoldering streets of rubble and ash multiple times.



Afghan nationals carry placards as they shout slogans during a demonstration against the Taliban government in Islamabad, Pakistan yesterday, on the occasion of the second anniversary of the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan.

PHOTO: AFP

SUDAN CONFLICT Situation 'spiralling out of control': UN

REUTERS

Millions of people are running out of food in Sudan and some are dying due to lack of healthcare after four months of war that have devastated the capital Khartoum and sparked ethnically-driven attacks in Darfur, the United Nations warned yesterday.

"Time is running out for farmers to plant the crops that will feed them and their neighbours. Medical supplies are scarce. The situation is spiralling out of control," UN agencies said in a joint statement.

The conflict between Sudan's army and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) erupted on April 15 over tensions linked to a planned transition to civilian rule, plunging the country into violence and threatening to destabilise the region.

More than four million people have been displaced, including nearly one million who have fled to neighbouring countries. Civilians in war-affected states have been killed in attacks.

"The remains of many of those killed have not been collected, identified or buried," but the UN estimates that more than 4,000 have been killed, Elizabeth Throssell, spokesperson for the High Commissioner for Human Rights, said in a briefing in Geneva.

Reports of sexual assaults have increased by 50 percent, said UN population fund official Laila Baker.

The millions who remain in Khartoum and cities in the Darfur and Kordofan regions have faced rampant looting and long power, communications and water cuts.

50pc chance 2023 will be warmest year on record

Say US govt climate experts, warn next year could be even hotter

AFP, Washington

There is a nearly 50 percent probability that 2023 will be the warmest year ever recorded and next year could be even hotter, US government climate experts said Monday.

"2023 to date has been the third warmest on record," National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) chief scientist Sarah Kapnick told reporters.

"It is virtually certain – over 99 percent chance – that 2023 will rank among the five warmest years on record with a nearly 50 percent probability that 2023 will rank warmest on record," Kapnick said.

Gavin Schmidt, director of the Nasa Goddard Institute for Space Studies, said next year could be even hotter than this year because of the Pacific warming phenomenon known as El Nino.

"The biggest impact of El Nino will actually occur in 2024," Schmidt said. "So we're anticipating that not only is 2023 going to be exceptionally warm and possibly a record warm year, but we anticipate that 2024 will be warmer still."

The European Union's climate observatory Copernicus reported last week that July was the hottest month ever recorded on Earth, and NOAA figures released on Monday were in line with the EU data.

"The average global surface temperature in July was 2.02 degrees Fahrenheit (1.12 degrees Celsius) above average, ranking it as the warmest July in NOAA's 174-year record," NOAA said.

NOAA also said that global ocean surface temperatures hit a record high in July for a fourth consecutive month, as El Nino conditions that emerged in June continued.



Kate Calvin, Nasa's chief scientist and senior climate advisor, said "climate change is having impacts on people and ecosystems all around the world."

"Along with changes in temperature, we're experiencing other changes in climate like sea level rise, declines in Arctic sea ice, wildfires, heavy precipitation events and more," Calvin said.

Bill Nelson, the administrator of the US space agency, said it is "self-evident that the Earth is heating up."

"Mother Nature is sending us a message," Nelson said. "And that message is we better act now, before it's too late to save our climate, in other words, to save our planet."

Sweltering temperatures have affected considerable swathes of the planet, with heat records registered from Death Valley in the US state of California to a northwest

China township as Canada and southern Europe battle wildfires.

The North Atlantic reached its hottest-ever level in the last week of July, several weeks earlier than its usual annual peak, according to preliminary data released by NOAA.

"Based on our analysis, the record-high average sea surface temperature in the North Atlantic Ocean is 24.9 degrees C, or 76.8 Fahrenheit, observed on July 28, Xungang Yin, a scientist at NOAA's National Centers for Environmental Information, told AFP.

The record is particularly startling as it comes early in the year – usually, the North Atlantic reaches its peak temperature in early September.

The previous record high was recorded in September 2022, at 24.89 degrees Celsius, Yin said.

Tourists found sleeping it off atop Eiffel Tower

AFP, Paris

Two American tourists were found sleeping off a heavy night in the heights of Paris' Eiffel Tower on Monday, after dodging security the night before, the monument's operator said yesterday. Security guards roused the men "in the early morning" as they were making their rounds before the French landmark's 9:00 am opening time, publicly-owned Eiffel Tower operator Sete said.

They "appear to have got stuck because of how drunk they were," Paris prosecutors told AFP. The inebriated Americans had spent their illicit night under the stars in a spot normally closed to the public between the tower's second and third levels, but "did not pose any apparent threat," said Sete.

After paying for an entry ticket around 10:40 pm on Sunday, the pair hopped security barriers while climbing down the stairs from the tower's top, a police source said. Firefighters were sent to recover the interlopers, the police source added.

N Korea's Kim, Putin vow stronger ties

REUTERS, Seoul

North Korea leader Kim Jong Un and Russian President Vladimir Putin exchanged letters yesterday pledging to develop their ties into what Kim called a "long-standing strategic relationship," Pyongyang's state media KCNA said. The letters mark the 78th anniversary of Korea's liberation from Japan's 1910-45 colonial rule, which is also celebrated as a national holiday in South Korea. In his letter to Putin, Kim said the two countries' friendship was forged in World War II with victory over Japan and is now "fully demonstrating their invincibility and might in the struggle to smash the imperialists' arbitrary practices and hegemony," KCNA said. "I am firmly convinced that the friendship and solidarity ... will be further developed into a long-standing strategic relationship in conformity with the demand of the new era," Kim was quoted as saying in the letter.

SPYING FOR RUSSIA

Three Bulgarians arrested in Britain

REUTERS, London

British police said yesterday they had charged two men and a woman with identity document offences after the BBC reported the group were accused of spying for Russia. The individuals are Bulgarian nationals, who were alleged to be working for Russian security services, the BBC said in its report, saying they had been held as part of a major national security investigation. London's Metropolitan Police confirmed five people had been arrested by counter-terrorism officers in February under the Official Secrets Act and three had since been charged with possession of false identity documents with improper intention. A police statement named them as Orlin Roussev, 45, Biser Dzambazov, 42, and Katrin Ivanova, 31. They appeared at London's Old Bailey Court in July and were remanded in custody until a future date.

Turkish journo jailed fifth time

AFP, Istanbul

Turkish investigative journalist Baris Pehlivan, who was ordered to return to prison by text message this month, was jailed yesterday for the fifth time in three years. The justice ministry informed him on August 2 via an SMS message that he had to surrender himself by August 15 to the prison in Silivi on the outskirts of Istanbul, where many of the government critics are held. Pehlivan's latest book, "SS", accuses former interior minister Suleyman Soyulu of having links to organised crime. "Baris might be released on parole," his lawyer Huseyin Ersoz told AFP. "A decision could be made at any time," he said. A former editor in chief at Oda TV and contributor to daily newspaper Cumhuriyet, Pehlivan has already been imprisoned four times. Two of those incidents involved him spending a day behind bars – once in February and once in May Pehlivan and six other journalists were sentenced to three years and nine months in prison in 2020 for reporting the funeral of a member of Turkey's MIT secret services who was operating in Libya, where Ankara supports the UN-recognised Tripoli government.



Local residents look at a landslide site caused by Typhoon Lan in Ayabe, Kyoto prefecture, western Japan yesterday, in this photo taken by Kyodo. Nearly 900 flights in Japan were cancelled and 240,000 people were ordered to move to safety as the slow-moving typhoon crossed main island of Honshu not far from the ancient capital of Kyoto, cutting off power to tens of thousands of homes.

PHOTO: REUTERS