

EL NINO
2024 could be hotter than record 2023
Warns UN

AFP, Geneva
This year could be hotter under El Nino's influence than the record-shattering 2023, the United Nations warned Friday, as it urged drastic emissions cuts to combat climate change.

The UN's World Meteorological Organization said new monthly temperature records were set every month between June and December, and the pattern is likely to continue due to the warming El Nino weather phenomenon.

The US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) predicted there is a one in three chance that 2024 will be warmer than 2023 -- and a 99 percent certainty that 2024 will rank among the five warmest years ever.

Nasa climatologist Gavin Schmidt, director of the Nasa Goddard Institute for Space Studies, estimated the odds were even higher.

"I put it at about 50-50: 50 percent chance it'll be warmer, 50 percent chance it will be slightly cooler," he told AFP, adding there were hints of "mysterious" changes to Earth's climate systems, that would nonetheless require more data to confirm or refute.

The UN's WMO weather and climate agency said July and August last year were the two hottest months ever recorded, as it officially confirmed 2023 had been the warmest year on record "by a huge margin".

The 2015 Paris climate accords aimed to limit global warming to well below two degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels -- and 1.5C if possible.

The WMO said the 2023 annual average global temperature was 1.45 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels (1850-1900) -- though one of the six datasets it relies on, the non-profit research organization Berkeley Earth, placed the figure as high as 1.54C.

The WMO's new secretary-general Celeste Saulo warned that El Nino, which emerged mid-2023, is likely to turn up the heat even further in 2024.



A man sits amid the rubble following Israeli bombardment in Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

CORPSES ON STREETS

Scenes of 'utter horror' in Gaza

Says UN official

CNN ONLINE

People starving and dead bodies left in the streets: This is the dire picture of conditions in northern Gaza painted by a top UN official in charge of relief operations in the enclave.

"Colleagues who have managed to make it to the north in recent days describe scenes of utter horror: Corpses left lying in the road. People with evident signs of starvation stopping trucks in search of anything they can get to survive," Martin Griffiths, UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, told members of the UN

Security Council on Friday.

"Even if people were able to return home, many no longer have homes to go to," he said, adding shelters are already housing far more people than they can cope with.

The risk of famine grows by the day as food and water is running out, he said, while the health system is "in a state of collapse."

Women are unable to give birth safely and children cannot get vaccinated, with cases of infectious diseases on the rise and people seeking shelter in hospital yards, he said.

In a stinging criticism, Griffiths said his team's efforts to send humanitarian

convoys to the north "have been met with delays, denials, and the imposition of impossible conditions," while "the lack of respect for the humanitarian notification system puts every movement of aid workers in danger."

Efforts to provide humanitarian assistance to other parts of the enclave have also been badly impacted, he said.

"Orders for evacuation are unrelenting. As ground operations move southwards, aerial bombardments have intensified in areas where civilians were told to relocate for their safety," Griffiths said.

"There is no safe place in Gaza. Dignified human life is a near impossibility," he said.

RED SEA CRISIS

India's FM to visit Iran

AFP, New Delhi

India's foreign minister is scheduled to visit Iran today for a two-day trip, following Western air strikes against Yemen's Houthi rebels over the Tehran-backed group's attacks on vessels in the Red Sea. S Jaishankar's visit also comes a month after a drone attack on a ship near Indian waters that the United States blamed on Iran. A government statement issued yesterday said that Jaishankar would meet his Iranian counterpart Hossein Amir-Abdollahian to discuss "bilateral, regional and global issues", without giving further detail. India has significantly stepped up its own maritime patrols in the Arabian Sea to "maintain a deterrent presence" after the string of attacks on vessels. In December a drone attack hit the MV Chem Pluto oil tanker 200 nautical miles (370 kilometres) off the coast of India, which the United States blamed on Iran -- claims Tehran dubbed "worthless". Earlier this month India's navy said it had rescued 21 crew members from a vessel in the Arabian Sea after a hijacking distress call. Jaishankar said Thursday he spoke to US Secretary of State Blinken about "maritime security challenges, especially (in) the Red Sea region".

Trump ordered to pay NYT \$400K

AFP, New York



Former US president Donald Trump was ordered to pay nearly USD400,000 in legal costs to the New York Times and multiple journalists Friday after a lawsuit he brought against them was dismissed. Trump had filed a complaint against the newspaper in September 2021, accusing three journalists of engaging in an "insidious plot" to obtain his tax documents as part of an investigative report that was published in 2018 and ended up winning a Pulitzer Prize. The decision issued Friday said the Times' estimation of having spent USD392,638 in attorney's fees appeared "reasonable," and ordered Trump to reimburse them in full. The paper's investigation revealed how Trump had in fact received the equivalent of USD413 million, adjusted for inflation, from his father over several years, much of which was transferred through a shell company to avoid taxation.



PHOTO: AFP

A car is buried in snow during a blizzard in the East Village neighborhood of Des Moines, Iowa, on Friday.

DELHI-MALE ROW
'No one has license to bully us'
Says Maldives president after China visit

AGENCIES

Maldives President Mohamed Muizzu yesterday issued a strong statement amid a diplomatic row with India.

Muizzu said that Maldives is a small country, but that is not a "license" for anybody to "bully" us, reports Times of India.

The remarks from the Maldivian president came at the Velana International Airport (VIA) after the conclusion of his 5-day visit to China.

India and Maldives recently engaged in a fresh row over alleged derogatory remarks made by three Maldivian ministers against Indian Prime

Minister Narendra Modi.

In his address, the Maldives President asserted that the ocean does not belong to any specific country and Maldives has one of the biggest shares of the ocean.

"Though we have small islands in this ocean, we have a vast exclusive economic zone of 9,00,000 square kilometres. Maldives is one of the countries with the biggest share of this ocean. This ocean does not belong to a specific country. This ocean also belongs to all countries situated in it," Times of India quoted Mohamed Muizzu as saying.



India protests UK diplomat's visit to PoK

REUTERS, MUMBAI

India said yesterday it had lodged a protest over a senior British diplomat's visit to Pakistan-controlled Kashmir, saying the trip this week had infringed on India's "sovereignty and territorial integrity".

Kashmir is claimed in full, but controlled only in part, by nuclear-armed India and Pakistan, which have fought two wars and engaged in numerous clashes over the Himalayan region since 1947.

British High Commissioner to Pakistan Jane Marriott visited Pakistani Kashmir along with an official from the UK Foreign Office on Jan. 10, India's Ministry of External Affairs said in a statement.

India's Foreign Secretary Vinay Kwatra has lodged a "strong protest" to the British High Commissioner to India about the visit, the ministry said, calling the trip "unacceptable".

A spokesperson for the British Foreign Office did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

This week's visit came as both India and Pakistan head to polls for elections this year.

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