

World News Roundup

Warming

Permafrost melting

Financial burn in frozen north

YELLOWKNIFE, Northwest Territories, Canada, Oct 17, (RTRS): Climate change is taking a heavy economic toll on Canada's far north, with buildings collapsing as melting permafrost destroys foundations, rivers running low and wildfires all a drain on the region's limited finances, senior government officials said.

A sprawling area spanning the Arctic Circle with a population of less than 50,000, Canada's Northwest Territories has spent more than \$140 million in the last two



Miltenberger

years responding to problems linked to global warming, the territory's finance minister said. "Our budgets are getting squeezed dramatically from climate change," Finance and Environment Minister J. Michael Miltenberger told the Thomson Reuters Foundation.

"The roads are constantly moving as the permafrost is melting... massive shore erosion is putting buildings at risk. We have spent hundreds of millions of dollars in the past few years and the tie to climate change is more and more evident."

Crucial

In this windswept territory, which already relies on central government subsidies, responding to global warming is crucial for its financial survival.

A major UN conference in Paris in December will aim to create a new global deal to curb climate change to take effect from 2020.

Scientists want to keep international temperature rises below 2 degrees compared with pre-industrial levels, while providing poor countries with money for adaptation.

But in parts of the Northwest Territories, average temperatures have already risen more than three degrees Celsius from pre-industrial levels, government officials said.

"In Paris, we are hoping for whatever it takes to turn this (climate change) around," politician Bob Bromley told the Thomson Reuters Foundation in the territorial capital, Yellowknife.

"It's going to require all hands on deck, and willing hands."

The delicate ecosystem of the wide-skied territory, home to the indigenous Dene people, and where wolves, caribou and bison roam, has been plunged into an environmental vicious cycle.

Climate change has been linked to decreased water levels in the territory's major rivers, partly due to greater evaporation, causing a sharp contraction in hydro electric power generation.

As a result, the government has had to import more diesel, borrowing about \$30 million this year alone to make up for the electricity shortfall, hurting its budget and increasing climate-warming emissions in a catastrophic feedback loop.

"It's not sustainable," said Miltenberger, the finance and environment minister.

He called on Canada's national government to provide more financial help for climate change mitigation, particularly in renewable power, to reduce the costs of importing diesel.

Hunting

With a small population, and high operating costs due to its size and climate, the territory's main employers are diamond mining and the public sector. The region's indigenous people rely on the hunting of caribou as a key food source, but herds are declining, with climate change likely a significant driver.

Northwest Territories receives financial transfer payments of about \$1.3 billion, or about \$29,000 per resident, from Canada's national government to run public services.

Also:

WASHINGTON: New administrative measures and private sector pledges to phase down the use of hydrofluorocarbons, potent greenhouse gases used in refrigeration and air conditioning, will reduce its consumption by the equivalent of 1 billion metric tons of CO2 through 2025, the White House has said Thursday.

The Obama administration announced a set of executive actions and commitments by over a dozen companies to curb the use of super greenhouse gases known as HFCs, which have a global warming potential 10,000 times greater than carbon dioxide.

HFCs have been used primarily in air conditioning, refrigeration, and foam insulation, as a substitute to chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs), which deplete the ozone layer, after their use was phased out through the Montreal Protocol.



This July 12, 2015 photo made available by NASA, astronaut Scott Kelly poses for a selfie photo in the 'Cupola' of the International Space Station. On Oct 16, Kelly broke the US record for the most time spent in space Friday - 382 days. (AP)

Climate

Hollande downbeat

France urges climate talks progress

PARIS, Oct 17, (AFP): French President Francois Hollande, on a visit to Iceland Friday, said he was "very pessimistic" about the effects of climate change as negotiators prepare for preparatory talks in Bonn on a climate rescue pact.

France is hosting a crucial year-end UN climate conference and officials will meet in the former west German capital on Monday for five days of intense debate over the blueprint for what would be the first-ever global climate agreement.

French Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius earlier urged delegates to make progress at the final official negotiating round before the Nov 30-Dec 11 Paris conference.

"We have to hope that parties accept it (the latest version of the draft) as the basis for negotiation," he told journalists in Paris.

"There will certainly be additions and changes and that is normal, but my wish is that parties will make the best use of these few days to make strong progress."

Standing at the foot of Iceland's Solheimajkull glacier, which is melting rapidly because of warmer temperatures, Hollande said he felt as if he was witnessing "the disappearance of history."

"I am very pessimistic about the effects of global warming. This glacier is receding by 50 metres a year — that's very fast, much faster than we had imagined," he told reporters.

Negotiators in Bonn will tackle a long list of deeply divisive issues,

starting with how to divvy up responsibility for limiting, and adapting to, fossil fuel-driven threats to the Earth's climate system.

There is also the question of who should foot the bill.

The Bonn session must yield an "advanced draft" to be polished by government ministers and heads of state for adoption in Paris.

Since the last meeting in September, the joint chairmen of the talks, Algeria's Ahmed Djoghlaif and Daniel Reifsnnyder of the United States, have slashed the blueprint from 80-odd pages to 20.

"Now we have to choose between the many options," Fabius said. "A maximum number of issues must be settled even before the beginning of the (Paris) conference."

"We have to avoid the Copenhagen syndrome," he added, referring to the 2009 UN conference in the Danish capital that ended with more than 110 frustrated heads of state and government struggling, in vain, to forge a comprehensive deal.

Deliver

For Paris, world leaders have been invited to attend on the first day only, to give "political impetus" to ministers and officials who must deliver the final product.

After Copenhagen, nations set a new deadline of 2015 for an agreement that would enter into force in 2020.

The overarching goal is to limit average global warming to two degrees

Celsius (3.6 degrees Fahrenheit) over pre-Industrial Revolution levels to avoid worst-case-scenario changes to Earth's climate system.

Diplomats convene in Bonn Monday for the last five-day negotiating session before 195 nations try to ink a global climate pact in December. The UN talks have made progress, but consensus remains elusive on many crucial points.

Here are some of the outstanding issues:

■ Define 'too hot' In 2010 the world's nations set a goal of preventing a rise of more than 2 degrees Celsius (3.6 degrees Fahrenheit) over pre-Industrial Revolution levels.

But small island states and poor nations — which will get hit early and hard by global warming — are today pushing for a lower ceiling of 1.5 degrees Celsius.

■ Money, money, money In 2009 rich countries pledged to mobilise \$100 billion (87 billion euros) per year from all sources by 2020 to help poor countries fight climate change and adapt to its impacts.

A recent report by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), an intergovernmental body, said climate finance from all sources hit \$62 billion in 2014.

More recently, the world's poorest countries have also pushed for payouts — beyond the \$100 billion — for "loss and damage" caused by global warming.

The United States and the European Union have balked at the concept of "compensation", but agreed to engage on the issue.

■ Slashing emissions One pillar of the Paris climate agreement will be the pledges that nearly 150 nations have already made for reducing their greenhouse gas emissions.

China, the United States and the European Union — which together pump out over half the world's carbon dioxide pollution — have led the way.

The emissions reduction plans presented so far, however, would still cause Earth to warm by 2.7 degrees Celsius, well past the danger mark, according to an analysis released in early October.

In response, some negotiators have proposed including a mechanism that would encourage countries to re-evaluate and ramp up their efforts over time.

■ Blame game Built into the negotiations is the principle that rich countries have been the major cause of the problem and are thus more responsible for fixing it.

The talks are taking place under the auspices of the 1992 charter of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, which enshrined this principle of "differentiation".

But wealthy countries insist that much has changed since then, and point out that nations once tagged as "developing" have made huge economic leaps and become big polluters in their own right.



Iceland's President Olafur Ragnar Grimsson gives a press conference during a visit of his French counterpart in Reykjavik on Oct 16. (AFP)



Dudley



Pouyanne

Discovery

Firms vow to fight warming: Ten of the world's leading oil and gas companies vowed Friday in Paris to help fight climate change, notably by shifting towards cleaner natural gas, but their promise was dismissed by Greenpeace as a public relations ploy.

The initiative to limit climate-altering greenhouse gas emissions comes six weeks ahead of a critical summit in Paris to negotiate a global climate rescue pact.

"We are committed to playing our part," chief executives of the 10 companies in the Oil and Gas Climate Initiative said in a joint statement, adding that they "recognise" the goal of limiting the global average temperature rise to two degrees Celsius (3.6 Fahrenheit).

The companies — BG Group, BP, Eni, Pemex, Reliance, Industries, Repsol, Saudi Aramco, Shell, Statoil and Total — account for nearly a fifth of the world's oil and natural gas production.

They said they had already reduced greenhouse gas emissions from their operations by 20 percent.

The oil and gas groups foresaw a shift towards relatively clean natural gas, promising to contribute to "increasing the share of gas in the global energy mix" without giving details.

They also outlined technical solutions including carbon capture and the elimination of "routine" flaring of natural gas, which oil groups have already promised to halt.

Investment in gas, renewables and technologies such as carbon capture and storage systems, "will contribute greatly to reducing the cost and impact of climate change for future generations," they said.

At a press conference in Paris, BP chief Bob Dudley said the big 10 energy firms were competitors but they could also cooperate.

"The technology can provide a solution for the future," added Total CEO Patrick Pouyanne.

Environmental defence group Greenpeace however derided the initiative.

"The oil companies behind this announcement have spent years lobbying to undermine effective climate action, each and every one of them has a business plan that would lead to dangerous global

temperature rises, yet suddenly they expect us all to see them as the solution, not the problem," Greenpeace campaigner Charlie Kronick said in a statement.

"Their latest intervention contains nothing meaningful that will significantly aid the decarbonisation of the global economy," he said.

The Nov 30-Dec 11 Paris climate summit offers an opportunity to make a shift towards clean renewable energy, Kronick said. (AFP)

■ Repaired SpaceX to fly: Space Exploration Technologies, or SpaceX, expects to return a repaired and upgraded



This illustration provided by Brigham Young University on Oct 16, depicts a pterosaur, which would have been the largest flying reptile of the time 210 million years ago, based on fossils found in 2009 at a site in Dinosaur National Monument near the town of Jensen in northeastern Utah. (AP)

Treasure trove of late Triassic fossils found

SALT LAKE CITY, Oct 17, (AP): Paleontologists have discovered a cliff-side in Utah brimming with fossils that offers a rare glimpse of desert life in western North America early in the age of dinosaurs.

Among the discoveries in what used to be a lake shoreline between giant sand dunes is a new pterosaur that would have been the largest flying reptile of the time. It wielded its ferocious teeth and powerful skull to gobble up small crocodile type creatures as it soared over a desert some 210 million years ago.

"If you saw one of these things coming at you with its jaws open, it would freak you out of your mind," said Brooks Britt, a Brigham Young University paleontologist.

Falcon 9 rocket to flight around the start of December, a company vice president said, less than six months after one exploded shortly after liftoff.

The 208-foot-tall (63-meter) rocket carrying cargo for the International Space Station exploded less than three minutes after liftoff from Florida on June 28.

The cause of the accident was traced to a faulty bracket inside the rocket's upper-stage liquid oxygen tank. When the steel bracket broke, a bottle of high-pressure helium was released, causing the tank to over-pressurise and explode.

"We believe in the next six to eight weeks we'll be able to return to flight," Lee Rosen, SpaceX vice president of mission and launch operations, said on Tuesday at the International Astronautical Congress under way this week in Jerusalem.

The Falcon 9, which failed after 18 successful flights, will carry a communications satellite for Luxembourg-based SES SA. Privately owned SpaceX is also expected to attempt to land the rocket's first-stage on a platform in the ocean after the second-stage takes over to deliver the SES satellite into orbit.

To try to achieve that, California-based SpaceX will use a more powerful version of the Falcon 9 than it has flown previously. SpaceX wants to return its rockets so they can be refurbished and reflown, slashing launch costs.

"Things are coming along nicely with the upgraded version of the vehicle and we're prepared to get back at this," Rosen said. (RTRS)