

## World News Roundup



The International Space Station (center), passes in front of the Moon in its Earth orbit as photographed from Salgotarjan, Hungary on July 5. (AP)

## Energy

## Fight over renewable push

## Call for Japan to cut its plutonium stocks

TOKYO, July 5, (AP) — Japan's nuclear policy-setting body on Thursday endorsed a call for stricter management of its fuel recycling program to reduce its plutonium stockpile.

The annual "nuclear white paper" approved by the Atomic Energy Commission is an apparent response to intensifying pressure from Washington as it pursues denuclearization in North Korea. It says Japan's fuel recycling program should continue, but minimize the amount of plutonium extracted from spent fuel for reuse in power generation to eventually reduce the stockpile.

Japan has pledged to not possess plutonium that does not have a planned use, but the promise increasingly sounds empty because of the slow restarts of Japanese power-generating reactors that can burn plutonium amid setbacks from the 2011 Fukushima disaster.

Though Japanese officials deny any possible misuse of the material and reprocessing technology, the large stockpile of plutonium that can make atomic bombs also raises security concerns as the US wants North Korea to get rid of its nuclear weapons.

Commission chairman **Yoshiaki Oka** said the effort to tackle the stockpile is Japan's own initiative underscoring its commitment to a peaceful nuclear program, and not because of the US Oka said he was not aware of any outstanding problem between the two countries over the plutonium issue, but that Japan is taking into consideration the importance of maintaining "relationship of trust with the US."

The commission is compiling guidelines to better manage and reduce the plutonium stockpile. Measures would include some government oversight in setting a cap on plutonium reprocessing and a study into how to steadily reduce the plutonium processed abroad.

Oka declined to cite a numerical target, but he said reducing the stockpile is a "must."

Japan has nearly 47 tons of plutonium — 10 tons at home and the rest in France and Britain, where spent fuel from Japanese nuclear plants has been reprocessed because Japan is not able to reprocess it into plutonium-based MOX fuel at home.

The amount is enough to make 6,000 atomic bombs, but at Japan's Rokkasho reprocessing plant denies any risk of proliferation, citing its safeguards and close monitoring by the International Atomic Energy Agency.

**Renewable energy push in Arizona:** Arizona's largest utility is fiercely opposing a push to mandate increased use of renewable energy in the sun-drenched state, setting up a political fight over a measure funded by a California billionaire.

Clean Energy for a Healthy Arizona aims to ask voters whether they want the state Constitution to require half of Arizona's electricity come from renewable sources like wind and solar by 2030. The group plans to file more than 225,000 signatures Thursday get the question on the November ballot.

Billionaire philanthropist Tom Steyer is financing the initiative through his NextGen Climate Action group, which supported similar efforts in Nevada and Michigan. But only the Arizona measure spawned a political battle, with the Republican-controlled Legislature passing a rule to help insulate utilities and the parent company of the state's largest electricity provider bankrolling opposition messaging.

Steyer, known for climate advocacy as well as his push to impeach President Donald Trump, says he's backing the proposal because of the benefits it will bring to Arizona.



In this March 2, 2018 photo, keeper Zachariah Mutai attends to Fatu, one of only two female northern white rhinos left in the world, in the pen where she is kept for observation, at the Ol Pejeta Conservancy in Laikipia county in Kenya. (AP)



This photograph taken on June 21, 2018 shows an assistant holding a 3D reconstruction of Roman emperor and military general Julius Caesar at The National Museum of Antiquities in Leiden, The Netherlands. The reconstruction was made on the basis of a 3D scan of a marble portrait in the museum's collection. (AFP)

## Discovery

**'Too many species are protected':** Poland's environment minister has angered environmentalists after saying he favors reducing the number of protected species including elk and bison because some of the animals damage crops — but he added it isn't easy in an age of "excessive sensitivity to animal protection."

**Henryk Kowalczyk** told residents in the northern town of Mlawa that his ministry had suggested to regional environmental authorities that they might grant more permits to hunt elk, bison, and beavers. These are all protected species under European law and the hunting of them is strictly controlled.

"We live in times of excessive sensitivity to animal protection, to put it mildly," Kowalczyk said Sunday, adding that his predecessor, Jan Szyszko, had given permission for the hunting of elk but had to cancel that almost immediately under pressure. His remarks were only widely reported in Polish media Thursday. (AP)

**Beijing eyes Mao tomb status:** Beijing wants to have Mao Zedong's Mausoleum and Tiananmen Square, powerful and controversial symbols of Chinese communist might, inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List, official media reported on Thursday.

The Chinese capital wants to apply for 14 sites in total to receive UNESCO World Heritage status by 2035, the state-run Global Times quoted city official Shu Xiaofeng as saying.

The 14 sites are located along the city's ancient Central Axis which runs north-south though Beijing and covers nearly two-thirds of the old city area. (AFP)

**GCF chief quits:** A Green Climate Fund (GCF) meant to channel billions of dollars to poor nations said it had had a "very difficult and disappointing" meeting on Wednesday, in a new setback after US President Donald Trump pulled out US support last year.

## Wildlife

## 7 pct of Australia reptiles risk extinction

## Embryos contain white rhino DNA

PARIS, July 5, (AFP) — Months after the death of Sudan, the world's last male northern white rhino, scientists said Wednesday they have grown embryos containing DNA of his kind, hoping to save the subspecies from extinction.

With only two northern white rhino (NWR) known to be alive today — both infertile females — the team hopes their breakthrough technique will lead to the re-establishment of a viable NWR breeding population.

"Our goal is to have in three years the first NWR calf born," Thomas Hildebrandt, head of reproduction management at the Leibniz Institute for Zoo and Wildlife Research in Berlin, told journalists of the work.

"Taking into account 16 months (of) pregnancy, we have a little more than a year to have a successful implantation."

The team's work, using a recently patented, two-metre (6.6-foot) egg extraction device, resulted in the first-ever test tube-produced rhino embryos.

Now frozen, these "have a very high chance to establish a pregnancy once implanted into a surrogate mother," said Hildebrandt.

The hybrid embryos were created with frozen sperm from dead NWR males and the eggs of southern white rhino (SWR) females, of which there are thousands left on Earth.

The eggs were harvested from rhinos in European zoos.

The team now hopes to use the technique to collect eggs from the last two northern white rhinos — Najin and Fatu, the daughter and granddaughter of Sudan. They live in a Kenyan national park.

By fertilising these with northern white rhino sperm and implanting the resulting embryos in surrogate southern white rhino females, the team intends to create a new, fledgling NWR population.

"Our results indicate that ART (assisted reproduction techniques) could be a viable strategy to rescue genes from the iconic, almost extinct, northern white rhinoceros," the team wrote in the journal Nature Communications.

The researchers have sought permission to harvest eggs from Najin and Fatu in Kenya, hopefully before the end of the year.

But the procedure is not without risk: "we have to do a full anaesthesia, the animal is down for two hours, and it is quite a risky situation" for the last two of their kind, conceded Hildebrandt.

Any hybrids born as a result may play a crucial future role as surrogates, sharing more genes with northern rhinos than purely southern surrogates.

Australian climate finance expert Howard Bamsey announced he was stepping down as executive director of the GCF at the end of the four-day meeting in Songdo, South Korea, the GCF said in a statement.

The GCF, whose South Korean headquarters opened in 2013 with backing from almost 200 nations, aims to help poor nations cut greenhouse gas emissions and adapt their economies to heatwaves, storms and rising seas. (RTRS)

## Shortage of veterinarians spells misery for Karachi zoo animals

KARACHI, July 5, (AFP) — A white African lioness stares blankly at the spectators crowded outside her small, steel-barred cage, her extraordinary coat dotted with numerous spots, the result of a fungal skin disease that has marred her once pristine fur.

The ailment is curable — or, rather, it should be. But at the Karachi Zoological Garden there are not enough vets to give proper treatment to its more than 850 animals, many held in cages built over a century ago.

"Here we have a mere two veterinarians and three paramedics. They are not at all sufficient," said the zoo's chief, Mansoor Ahmed Qazi.

Management have been pushing the city council to approve a third veterinary position for the zoo's population, including lions, tigers, elephants, chimpanzees, birds and reptiles.

But the council has usually focused more on sewage, roads, and garbage removal in the chaotic port megacity of some 20 million people, which until recently had been rocked by years of political and ethnic violence.

"This is unfortunate, that the zoo is heavily understaffed and thus not able to take good care of the animals," said Humaira Ayesha, an expert from the World Wild Fund for Nature (WWF) in Karachi.

Unfortunately the problem is not limited to Karachi.

Islamabad's zoo has long been criticised for its treatment of its lone elephant, Kaavan, which became the subject of a high-profile rights

campaign backed by music icon Cher in 2016 after it emerged the animal was being kept in chains.

And the zoo in northwestern Peshawar, which opened in February, has admitted that 30 animals so far have died while being transferred or in quarantine, including three rare snow leopard cubs.

"Peshawar Zoo is very understaffed, and those we have are untrained," spokesman Naimat Khan told AFP.

There is little legislation in Pakistan to help support animal welfare. The most recent law on the books addressing animal cruelty dates from 1890.

Such little legal recourse "makes it difficult for the country to improve animal welfare standards in its zoos", Ayesha of the WWF said.

At the Karachi Zoological Gardens, shops have encroached on the zoo property, still dotted with centuries-old tamarind, banyan and ficus trees.

"Stones and garbage from the shops are thrown into the animal enclosures. That amounts to cruelty," Faheem Zaman, a former chief of Karachi Metropolitan Corporation, says.

Visitors also throw things into the animals' cages. An official recalled that a spectator once threw a handkerchief knotted with a steel wire towards an ostrich, which gulped it down.

"The long neck of the ostrich was badly damaged and we had to operate," says Abida Raees, a zoologist and deputy chief of the zoo.

## Also:

**GENEVA:** Australia's reptiles, including lizards and snakes, are facing growing threats from invasive species and climate change, with seven percent on the verge of extinction, conservationists said Thursday.

In an update to its "Red List" of threatened species, the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) said virtually all of Australia's unique reptile species were now considered threatened and that one in 14 risked extinction.

"This Red List update highlights the vulnerability of Australia's lizards and snakes to invasive alien species," Philip

Bowles, who coordinates IUCN's work on snakes and lizards, said in a statement.

A full 975 Australian reptile species are currently on the Red List, IUCN said, adding that the vast majority of the threatened species were endemic to Australia.

The island continent is home to an unusually diverse reptile population, which evolved in isolation and represents almost 10 percent of the global reptile fauna.

Invasive species are the main threat to most of the threatened reptiles in Australia, IUCN said, pointing to a recent study showing that invasive feral cats alone kill about 600 million reptiles each year in the country.

**China not participating:** China has cooled to a landmark deal to curb emissions from international flights, with the country no longer listed as a participant in the agreement's first phase, according to the United Nations aviation agency's website.

China does not appear on a June 29 list of participants in the voluntary phase of the deal brokered by the International Civil Aviation Organization in 2016, according to ICAO's website. (RTRS)



Mao Zedong



Kowalczyk