

World News Roundup



This photo taken on July 30, 2018 shows children watching a Keeko robot make its way on a path they made from square mats at the Yiswind Institute of Multicultural Education in Beijing. In China, robots are being developed to deliver groceries, provide companionship to the elderly, dispense legal advice and now, as Keeko's creators hope, join the ranks of educators. (AFP)

Climate

Bangkok under siege

Talks on 'treaty' to protect seas starts

UNITED NATIONS, United States, Sept 2. (AFP): United Nations member states on Tuesday kick off long-awaited talks on a 2020 treaty that would regulate the high seas, which cover half the planet yet lack adequate environmental protection.

Four sessions of talks, each lasting two weeks, are planned to take place over two years, with the goal of protecting marine biodiversity and avoiding further pillaging of the oceans.

"The negotiations will relate to spaces beyond national jurisdictions, or areas that belong to no country in particular," said Julien Rochette of the Paris-based think tank Iddri, or the Institute of Sustainable Development and International Relations.

Talk will focus on "the high seas and the international zone of marine waters, or about 46 percent of the planet's surface," he added.

In 1982, the UN adopted the Convention on the Law of the Sea, but left the high seas free from restrictions.

"All States enjoy the traditional freedoms of navigation, overflight, scientific research and fishing on the high seas," it said.

The convention took effect in 1994, without the participation of the United States.

Since then, shipping routes have expanded considerably, and the resources of the ocean deep have aroused significant interest, whether by fishing or mineral extraction.

"Marine life is already reeling from the impact of industrial fishing, climate change and other extractive industries. We have a shared responsibility to protect our global oceans before it is too late," said Sandra Schoettner, a marine biologist with Greenpeace.

Talks will focus on creating protected areas on the high seas, more sharing of maritime resources and technology, and research on environmental impacts.

Some whale-hunting nations, like Japan, Iceland and Norway, are expected to be more cautious than others because they fear overly strict fishing restrictions.

The United States is also reticent "because they are opposed to all regulation of marine genetic resources and they did not ratify the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea," said Rochette.

Bangkok struggles to stay afloat: As Bangkok prepares to host climate-change talks, the sprawling city of more than 10 million is itself under siege from the environment, with dire forecasts warning it could be partially submerged in just over a decade.

A preparatory meeting begins Tuesday in Thailand's capital for the next UN climate conference, a crunch summit in Poland at the end of 2018 to set rules on reducing greenhouse emissions and providing aid to vulnerable countries.

As temperatures rise, abnormal weather patterns — like more powerful cyclones, erratic rainfall, and intense droughts and floods — are predicted to worsen over time, adding pressure on governments tasked with bringing the 2015 Paris climate treaty to life.

Bangkok, built on once-marshy land about 1.5 metres (five feet) above sea level, is projected to be one of the world's hardest hit urban areas, alongside fellow Southeast Asian behemoths Jakarta and Manila.

"Nearly 40 percent" of Bangkok will be inundated by as early as 2030 due to extreme rainfall and changes in weather patterns, according to a World Bank report.



In this Feb 23, photo provided by the British Museum of London, a silver drinking horn featuring a mythical griffin and believed to date to the 5th or 4th century B.C. is depicted. A new exhibition at the Harvard Art Museums explores how the ancients literally partied in beast mode, with cups shaped like the beings they revered the most: animals (AP)



Notley



Trudeau

Discovery

Alberta quits CO2 tax initiative: After pipeline ruling the Canadian province of Alberta announced Thursday it would pull out of Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's flagship climate change initiative in protest against a court ruling against the expansion of the Trans Mountain pipeline.

A court had earlier quashed the government's approval of expanding the Trans Mountain pipeline to the Pacific, siding with indigenous people worried that increased tanker traffic will harm whales along the coast.

Landlocked Alberta in western Canada, which sits on the world's third largest oil reserves, was set to rely on the pipeline to sell oil to Asian markets via the port of Vancouver.

"As important as climate action is to our province I have also always said that taking the next step, in signing on to the federal climate plan, can't happen without the Trans Mountain pipeline," Premier Rachel Notley told reporters in a live address Thursday evening.

"With the Trans Mountain halted and the work on it halted, until the federal government gets its act together, Alberta is pulling out of the federal climate plan," she said.

Trudeau's government introduced a federal carbon tax earlier this year to curb greenhouse gas emissions, set to rise steadily from Can\$10 (\$7.50) per tonne this year to Can\$50 per tonne in 2022.

"Let's be clear, without Alberta that plan isn't worth the paper it's written on," Notley said. (AFP)

Chilean environmentalists fight: Chile is home to four-fifths of South America's glaciers and has some of the largest ice fields in the world outside the polar regions,

Archaeology

Animal-themed drinkware shows ancients partied in beast mode

Nile Delta village predated pharaohs

CAIRO, Sept 2. (Agencies): Egypt said Sunday that archaeologists have unearthed one of the oldest villages ever found in the Nile Delta, with remains dating back to before the pharaohs.

The Antiquities Ministry said the Neolithic site was discovered in Tell el-Samara, about 140 kilometers (87 miles) north of Cairo. Chief archaeologist Frederic Gio said his team found silos containing animal bones and food indicating human habitation as early as 5,000 BC.

That would be some 2,500 years before the Giza pyramids were built.

In recent years, Egypt has touted discoveries in the hopes of reviving tourism after the unrest that followed its 2011 popular uprising.

A new exhibition at the Harvard Art Museums explores how the ancients literally partied in beast mode.

"Animal-Shaped Vessels from the Ancient World: Feasting with Gods, Heroes, and Kings" opens Friday at the Harvard Art Museums. It offers visitors a glimpse of six dozen elaborate drinking and pouring vessels spanning three millennia and three continents — all shaped like real or mythological beasts.

Curator Susanne Ebbinghaus says the display explores the primal connection between humans, animals and libation.

Archaeologists long have marveled at how much animal-themed drinkware used in songs, speeches, prayers and other rituals has survived the ravages of time.

One cup on show, in the form of a snarling lion, is believed to date to the early 2,000s BC.

Ancient ominous warnings carved on usually submerged boulders along the Elbe River had for centuries driven fear into the hearts of Czechs, but their reappearance during this year's drought is just a reminder of how tough people had it.

The so-called Hunger Stones can only be seen above the water surface during droughts, and used to presage bad harvests, interrupted river navigation and consequent famine. Now, the messages appear weeks after weather and crop forecasts.

In Decin, just over 100km (60 miles) north of Prague and not far from the German border, a boulder that is central Europe's oldest hydrological marker is fully exposed after the water level in the river dropped to 115 cm.

The rock, sitting below Tyrns Bridge, is marked in Czech and German, with one message from pub owner Franz Mayer in 1904 saying: "If you see me, weep."

The oldest visible marking on the stone is from 1616.

"With time, when drought came again, more people left messages," said Vlastimil Pazourek, director of the Regional Museum in Decin. "This stone is a calling card for what has happened in the region."

As time went by, the doom and gloom gave way to a more humorous and entrepreneurial approach.

The 1904 message was answered in a poem in the 1930s by the owner of a local pump factory with: "Don't cry, girl, don't fret. When it's dry, just spray your field wet."

This year's drought and a heatwave scorched fields in northern and eastern Europe hitting farmers hard, but it is only likely to cut the European Union's wheat export surplus, meaning the bloc will have to consume more of its own grains, analysts say.

The Decin boulder emerges when the water drops below 160 cm, and the current low level is preventing commercial and passenger boats from sailing. Most goods nowadays are brought by truck or rail, however.

glaciers," he said. (AFP)

More, hungrier crop-eating bugs:

A warmer world likely means more and hungrier insects chomping on crops and less food on dinner plates, a new study suggests.

Insects now consume about 10 percent of the globe's food, but that will increase to 15 to 20 percent by the end of the century if climate change isn't stopped, said study lead author Curtis Deutsch, a University of Washington climate scientist.

The study looked at the damage bugs like the European corn borer and the Asiatic rice borer could do as temperatures rise. It found that many of them will increase in number at key times for crops. The hotter weather will also speed up their metabolism so they'll eat more, the researchers report in Thursday's journal Science. Their predictions are based on computer simulations of bug and weather activity.

"There's going to be a lot of crop loss, so there won't be as much grain on the table," said study co-author Scott Merrill, an ecology professor at the University of Vermont.

The researchers calculate additional losses of 53 million tons (48 million metric tons) in wheat, rice and corn from hungry bugs if the temperature rises another 2.7 degrees (1.5°C) from now. The study estimates that in that warmer scenario, American corn, wheat and rice losses from insects will jump by a third above current levels. Bug damage to Russia's rice crop would jump sixfold. And nine countries — North Korea, Mongolia, Finland, Kyrgyzstan, Georgia, Bhutan, Armenia, the United Kingdom and Denmark — would see at least a doubling of wheat loss from bugs. If there are no drastic cuts in emissions from coal, oil and gas, the world will reach that 2.7 degree mark and extra insect loss around 2050 — give or take a decade or so, Deutsch said. (AP)



This undated photo released by the Egyptian Ministry of Antiquities shows one of the oldest villages ever found in the Nile Delta, with remains dating back to before the pharaohs in Tell el-Samara, about 140 kilometers (87 miles) north of Cairo, Egypt. Chief archaeologist Frederic Gio says his team found silos containing animal bones and food indicating human habitation as early as 5,000 B.C. (AP)