

Climate

Bloomberg shows up

Climate talks get into tough phase

MADRID, Dec 10, (Agencies): American billionaire and Democratic presidential contender **Michael Bloomberg** says that the next US president should halt fossil fuel subsidies altogether.

Bloomberg, who launched his campaign less than three weeks ago, is attending a United Nations global climate conference in Madrid that is kicking into high gear.

Ministers from nearly 200 countries are arriving on Tuesday to tackle some of the tough issues that negotiations couldn't resolve over the past week, including finalizing the rules for international carbon markets that economists say could help drive down emissions and help poor countries to cope with the effects of rising temperatures.

Opening an event on sustainable finances organized by the summit hosts, Spain, Bloomberg said that "the next president of the United States should end all subsidies for fossil fuel companies and fossil fuel extraction, and that includes tax breaks and other special treatment."

"He or she should reinvest that funding into clean energy, which will also create a lot of new jobs," he added.

The 77-year-old businessman and former New York mayor is expected to share the results of his private push to organize thousands of US cities and businesses to abide by the terms of a global climate treaty that the Trump administration is working to abandon.

"Americans are willing to continue to work even with a climate change denier in the White House," Bloomberg told a room packed of journalists and officials.

"The White House matters, but sometimes not too much," he added.

Rejoin

The Democrat has vowed to rejoin the Paris climate agreement if he's elected as president. He recently stepped down as the UN's special envoy for climate action.

Unlike at many past climate summits, few heads of government are joining the talks in Madrid. The US has sent a career diplomat, Ambassador Marcia Bernicat, as head of its delegation.

John Kerry, the former Secretary of State under the last Democrat administration, is also attending events on the sidelines of the Madrid conference, and said the absence of any representative from the White House at the talks "speaks for itself."

"It's an absence of leadership," Kerry told The Associated Press. "It's a tragedy."

Most other countries are sending environment ministers or other senior officials instead of prime ministers or presidents, worrying some observers.

"It shows that there has not yet been an internalization of the emergency situation that we are in, that so few heads of state are coming to Madrid and ready to roll up their sleeves and do what it takes to actually respond to the science," said Jennifer Morgan, executive director of Greenpeace International.

She also accused some governments, such as Brazil and Saudi Arabia, of trying to weaken the agreements, and called on the European Union to work with vulnerable nations to counter those efforts.

Environmental campaigners are hoping the EU will present an ambitious plan this week for cutting emissions in the medium- and long-term that would send a message of hope to weary negotiators in Madrid.

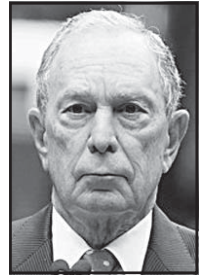
The new head of the bloc's executive Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, has backed a call for the EU to stop all net emissions of greenhouse gases by 2050.

Scientists say emissions worldwide need to start falling sharply from next year if there is to be any hope of achieving the Paris climate accord's goal of capping global warming at 1.5°C (2.7°F).

Negotiators in Madrid had worked until 3 am to prepare the ground for ministers, said Sigrid Kaag, the Dutch Minister for Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation.

"Let's hope to see that we can ... really sort of give shape and meaning to the call 'Time for action'," said Kaag, referring to the motto of the UN talks. "It's now or never."

Meanwhile, scientists who have been warning for decades about the catastrophic effects of warming temperatures joined activists in demanding greater political will against them.



Bloomberg



NASA administrator Jim Bridenstine speaks to a group of invited news media and social media influencers in front of NASA's Space Launch System (SLS) core stage and engines that will be used in the Artemis 1 mission, at the NASA Michoud Assembly Center in New Orleans on Dec 9. (AP)

Space

US aims to put man on moon by 2024

NASA reveals 1st look of moon rocket

NEW ORLEANS, Dec 10, (AP): NASA administrator Jim Bridenstine and the media got an up-close look Monday at a huge, newly completed rocket for the program aimed at putting a man and woman on the moon as early as 2024.

Bridenstine was in New Orleans to see the first of the "core stage" rockets for NASA's Space Launch System at the Michoud Assembly Center, where it was built for NASA's Artemis program.

The rocket, 212 feet (65 meters) tall and more than 27 feet (8 meters) in diameter, is to be loaded on a barge by year's end for transport to the Stennis Space Center in neighboring coastal Mississippi.

There, Bridenstine said, it will undergo tests before being transported to Cape Canaveral, Florida. According to NASA, the first non-reusable rocket is to be launched for a test flight carrying a spacecraft without a crew, a mission known as Artemis I. A second would later send a crewed spacecraft into space. The third mission, Artemis III, would put a man and woman on the south pole of the moon, with an eye toward a continued presence that would lead eventually to a trip to Mars.

"We are making significant progress towards achieving that Artemis III mission and getting our first woman and next man to the south pole of the moon in 2024," Bridenstine said.

Among others attending the NASA event was Jasmin Moghbeli, who is set to graduate from the astronaut training

program next year.

"Just seeing us go back to the moon and doing that in a sustainable way and using that as a stepping bed to move on further than we've ever been before, going to Mars, is super exciting," Moghbeli said. "And the fact that I'm in the astronaut office now and, you know, to think of the next people to go on the moon, I will know them. And it will be such an incredible thing for girls around the country and around the world to see a woman on the moon for the first time."

Cooler

Meanwhile, winning a Nobel Prize is an achievement is a class of its own. But it might be even cooler to be an astronaut.

That's the view of two of this year's Nobel laureates, who held a video call with two members of the International Space Station's crew.

The Friday call was part of the public appearances of winners in the Swedish capital ahead of next week's prize presentations.

After the crew took some questions from winners of the physics and chemistry prizes, Italian astronaut Luca Parmitano asked if any of them would switch places with him. Didier Queloz and M. Stanley Whittingham said they would.

"Nothing prevents an astronaut to get another prize," Queloz quipped.

Whittingham, 77, said he would have switched places if he were younger.

Queloz and Michel Mayor, who was

also on the ISS call, share this year's prize worth 9 million kronor (\$948,000) for discovering the first extrasolar planet orbiting a sun-like star. Queloz asked the astronauts about how they viewed the prospects of finding life elsewhere in the universe.

"We would be very naive statistically to think that there is no life on other planets," said American astronaut Jessica Meir. "One of the interesting things about it is that life might not look anything like us; it might not even be carbon-based."

Whittingham is one of the three winners of this year's chemistry Nobel for development of lithium-ion batteries.

The batteries were praised by Meir, who noted that they have been recently installed on the space station, replacing nickel-hydrogen batteries for "significant performance advantages." One lithium-ion battery can replace two of the previous batteries and last 10 years instead of 6-1/2, she said.

In another development, The Russian military conducted an experiment Friday involving maneuvering a space vehicle in orbit.

A small satellite separated from a carrier "space platform," the Defense Ministry said in a statement. It said the vehicle transmitted images to assess the "technical condition" of another Russian satellite as part of the experiment. It described the test as part of an ongoing effort to check the condition of satellites.



Climate activist Greta Thunberg speaks during a meeting with leading climate scientists at the COP25 summit in Madrid, Spain on Dec 10. Thunberg is in Madrid where a global UN sponsored climate change conference is taking place. (AP)

Discovery

Sarajevo hit by pollution:

Authorities say air pollution in the Bosnian capital of Sarajevo has reached dangerous levels in recent days, prompting officials to ban freight vehicles from the roads, cancel all outdoor public events and warn citizens to remain indoors.

Officials have also reduced coal-fueled central heating temperatures for buildings and banned dust-producing construction.

The measures were imposed this week by the Sarajevo regional government. It says Sunday that for most of the past three days, the values for PM10 particulate matter in the air have been at least twice – and sometimes five times – the European Union limit of 50 micrograms per cubic meter.

Situated in a deep valley and surrounded by high mountains, Sarajevo has historically suffered from high concentrations of fog, smog and dust. (AP)

**SKorea shuts plants:** South Korea has shut down 10 coal-fired power plants on Tuesday as part of its anti-pollution campaign, the energy ministry said.

The shutdown comes after the government said last month it would idle up as much as 15 coal-fired power plants between December and February, while its remaining plants are expected to supply

sufficient power.

In a statement late Monday, the energy ministry said 41 coal-fired power plants would operate at 80% capacity.

South Korea, Asia's fourth-largest economy, operates about 60 coal-fired power plants, generating about 40% of its electricity. (AP)

**Bid to review bear status:** US officials will review whether grizzly bears have enough protections across the Lower



Santarsiere



Christensen

48 states after advocates sued the government in a bid to restore the fearsome animals to more areas, according to court documents filed Monday.

The review must be completed by March 31, 2021, under a settlement approved by US District Judge **Dana Christensen**.

"There are a lot of places where grizzly bears used to live where we believe they could currently live," said **Andrea Santarsiere**, an attorney for the group. (AP)

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