

Climate

EU trumpets Deal

Thunberg named Time's Person of Year for 2019

MADRID, Dec 11, (Agencies): Teenage climate activist **Greta Thunberg** accused world political and business leaders of being more concerned with their own image than taking aggressive action in the fight against climate change at a United Nations summit on Wednesday.

Delegates in Madrid are wrangling over how to implement a 2015 agreement in Paris to avert potentially catastrophic global warming – but the 16-year-old Swede admonished their approach.

"It seems to have turned into some kind of opportunity for countries to negotiate loopholes and to avoid raising their ambition," she said on stage, drawing applause from an audience that included dozens of her supporters.

"I'm sure that if people heard what was going on and what was said ... during these meetings, they would be outraged," added Thunberg, who was named Time Magazine's Person of the Year for 2019 on Wednesday.

Politicians are grappling with outstanding issues in the implementation of the Paris pact including rules governing carbon markets and calls to raise emissions targets next year.

"The real danger is when politicians and CEOs are making it look like real action is happening when in fact almost nothing is being done apart from clever accounting and creative PR," Thunberg added.

UN chief Antonio Guterres exhorted major world economies on Wednesday to signal more ambitious commitments to cut greenhouse emissions as climate talks in Madrid hit an intense phase.

"We need to have the big emitters understanding that their role is essential, because if the big emitters fail, everything will fail," Guterres told Reuters in an interview.

"If we just go on as we are, we are doomed."

Avert

He was speaking in a hangar-like conference centre in Madrid where ministers from around the world are cloistered in the final days of two-week talks to shore up the 2015 Paris Agreement to avert catastrophic global warming.

Major polluting countries such as China, India and the United States – which is leaving the pact – are not expected to make big new announcements at the summit, where delegates are focused on technical negotiations over rules on carbon markets.

Nevertheless, Guterres hopes the talks will conclude on Friday with a strong signal that governments are ready to submit more ambitious climate plans in 2020, seen as a make-or-break year for the Paris process.

Under the deal, countries are supposed to submit more stringent targets to cut carbon emissions in the run-up to the next annual round of talks in Glasgow.

Scientists say that current pledges are nowhere near enough to stabilise the earth's climate in time to avert catastrophic sea-level rise, prevent severe damage to agriculture, and stop droughts and floods generating waves of forced mass migration.

Guterres urged major emitters to send a clear signal they are ready to increase their ambition next year and "hopefully" commit to net zero carbon emissions by 2050 – seen as vital to keeping global temperatures within manageable levels.

The European Union's new executive was set to launch a "Green Deal" policy package on Wednesday, trumpeting the plan to raise 100 billion euros for the initiative and enshrine a 2050 carbon neutrality goal as its "man on the moon moment".

Japanese Environment Minister Shinjiro Koizumi acknowledged criticism of his country's high dependence on coal from Guterres and others. "While taking these criticisms seriously I would like to stress Japan is taking concrete action towards decarbonisation and delivering the results," he told the session.

Many high-emitting countries and companies are banking on meeting their commitments to cut greenhouse gases by turning to carbon markets, which enable those exceeding reduction targets to buy credits from others that do not. Supporters of carbon markets say they lower the cost of reducing emissions and enable countries to commit to more ambitious targets. Others see them as a way to stall more aggressive action.

European Union states rejected on Wednesday a deal on a set of rules governing which financial products can be called "green" and "sustainable", an EU official said, in a major setback for the bloc's climate ambitions.

The deal struck last week by EU lawmakers and the Finnish presidency of the EU was blocked on Wednesday by EU diplomats at a meeting in Brussels, as several governments raised concerns on the agreement.

Talks with the European Parliament will have to resume in coming days with the aim of finding a deal before the end of the year, the official added.



Thunberg



In this Aug 15, 2019 file photo, a boat navigates at night next to large icebergs in eastern Greenland. (AP)



An inside view of the underground Basilica of Porta Maggiore following restoration work in Rome on Dec 10. (AP)

Discovery

Delhi air turns hazardous: Air quality in India's capital New Delhi plummeted to "severe" on Wednesday due to a drop in temperature and wind speed that trapped pollutants in the atmosphere, prompting health warnings from the government for the 12th time in two months.

On Tuesday, the air quality index crossed 400, indicating a level of pollution that affects healthy people and seriously impacts those with existing diseases, according to government guidance. **Arvind Kejriwal** is Chief Minister of Delhi.

The index measures small particulate matter of 2.5 microns or less in diameter (PM2.5) that can penetrate the lungs and enter the blood system. Chronic exposure to such particles contributes to the risk of developing cardiovascular and respiratory diseases, as well as lung cancer, according to the World Health Organization.

The Ministry of Health said those vulnerable to health risks should avoid outdoor physical activities when the air quality index is between poor to severe. India's Prime Minister is **Narendra Modi**. (AP)

Basilica gets a face-lift: An ancient underground basilica that only came to light a century ago has gotten a face-lift in Rome, with its refreshed splendor unveiled on Tuesday.

The structure, near a gateway to ancient Rome known as Porta Maggiore, dates from the 1st century. Its original use is a mystery. Some scholars think the underground space served as a place for followers of a cult. Others say it likely was a funerary hall.

Water, infiltrating from above, had left its inner walls encrusted with mold, bacteria and calcium deposits. The basilica is decorated with splendid stucco work depicting mythological figures and daily life scenes. Discovered in 1917 during excavation for a nearby rail line, its layout is considered the earliest known architectural example in Rome of the famed basilica layout. (AP)

Climate

Climate change hitting top US fishery

Arctic habitats, cultures on thin ice

WASHINGTON, Dec 11, (Agencies): Rising temperatures and shrinking snow and ice cover in the Arctic are endangering habitats, fisheries and local cultures, according to a report issued Tuesday by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

"A lot of people think of the Arctic as being a faraway place, but the loss of ice is affecting people now – it's changing peoples' lives," said Don Perovich, a Dartmouth College geophysicist who contributed to the report. "It isn't just a bunch of cold statistics."

The Bering Sea, which lies between Alaska and Russia, is one of the world's two most productive fisheries. But the Arctic region is warming more than twice as fast as the rest of the planet, the report found.

The past two years saw record low levels of sea ice – frozen seawater – floating on the Bering Sea during winter, the report found. And the habitats of fish on which commercial fisheries and indigenous groups depend have shifted northward, according to the report released at the annual meeting of the American Geophysical Union.

"Fishing industries are built around the assumption that fish will be in a certain place at a certain time, but that's changing in response to a rapidly changing Arctic," said Waleed Abdalati, an environmental scientist at the University of Colorado-Boulder who was not part of the report.

For the first time, the US agency's annual "Arctic Report Card" includes observations from indigenous groups who hunt and fish in the region.

"We look for the return of the sea ice every fall season," wrote 10 representatives of the region's more than 70 indigenous communities. "The ice provides access to seals, whales, walrus, fish, crabs and other marine life for our subsistence harvests."

The communities once saw the ice in the northern Bering Sea during eight months of the year, but now they only see it for three or four months, the report found.

Meanwhile, a new scientific paper published Tuesday in the journal Nature found that the melting of Greenland's ice sheet has accelerated. The melting is now seven times faster than in the 1990s.

Disruptions

Less ice means feeding disruptions for many Arctic species. Polar bears stalk their prey, including seals, on ice. Ivory gulls scavenge on ice for scraps of those hunts, as well as for small fish and other creatures.

"Birds are migrating to the Arctic and not finding the food they need," said Matthew Druckenmiller, a scientist at the University of Colorado Boulder's National Snow and Ice Data Center and one of the NOAA report editors. "They are showing up with empty stomachs on the beaches. The indigenous communities are reporting seeing seabirds dead on beaches in numbers they haven't seen before."

Arctic Canada's breeding population of ivory gulls has declined 70% since the 1980s, the report found. This is likely due to loss of sea ice as well contamination in the food chain.

"The ivory gull in the Arctic is like the canary in the coal mine," said Abdalati. "It's really incumbent on us to understand why these changes are happening, and what can be done."

While the changes are widespread in the Arctic, the effect on wildlife is acute in the eastern shelf of the Bering Sea, which yields more than 40% of the annual US fish and shellfish catch.

"The changes going on have the potential to influence the kinds of fish products you have available to you, whether that's fish sticks in the grocery store or shellfish at a restaurant," said Rick Thoman, a meteorologist in Alaska and one of the report's authors.

The warning was the latest from a US government agency about climate change even as President Donald Trump has voiced skepticism about global warming and pushed to maximize production of oil, gas and coal. Last month his administration filed paperwork to withdraw the United States from the 2015 Paris agreement on climate change.

The report identified a decrease in recent years in the Bering Sea "cold pool", which used to be a dependable mass of very salty frigid water down to the sea floor that functioned as a natural fence separating fish species. That has likely caused a shift in distribution of walleye pollock and Pacific cod, the report said.

No cold pool was found in 2018 and this year it was smaller than normal, it said. Fish stocks are scrambled, with some species moving north. Crab fishermen in Nome have reported catching more cod than crabs, as Pacific cod are not doing as well south of there. Last week, the North Pacific Fishery Management Council shut down the 2020 Pacific cod harvest in the Gulf of Alaska.

supply all households, as part of efforts to meet ambitious climate change targets. Denmark is home to wind turbine giant Vestas and the world's largest developer of offshore wind, and recently approved a law which targets reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 70% by 2030. The energy ministry is looking for the right location to build one or more islands surrounded by offshore wind farms with a total capacity of at least 10 GW – equivalent to 10 million European households' electricity consumption. (RTS)



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