

World News Roundup

Environment

Commercial CCS

US push to capture CO2 fuses interests

JACKSON, Wyoming, May 22, (RTRS): Jason Albritton, who works for green group The Nature Conservancy, says he is all for technology to suck carbon dioxide (CO2), the main cause of climate change, out of the air.

Stephen Johnson, President of Illinois Clean Fuels, a start-up that will produce jet fuel from municipal garbage, is also a fan of the nascent technique known as carbon capture and storage (CCS). He plans to turn a profit pumping the planet-warming gas he traps underground.

For Don Gaston, meanwhile, who heads the Illinois utility Prairie State Generating Company, capturing CO2 offers the promise of keeping his coal-fired power plant running at a time of rising pressure to pollute less.



Heitkamp

Environmentalists and fossil fuel industry representatives made for strange bedfellows this week as they convened outside the US ski town of Jackson, Wyoming, to strategize on ways to get commercial CCS off the ground across the United States.

CCS involves separating carbon dioxide from other gases and re-using it as an ingredient in anything from plastics to fizzy drinks, or storing it away for good, typically in geological formations.

The technology is gradually gaining momentum worldwide, with the United Nations saying in a scientific report last year it would likely be needed to keep the rise in global temperatures below catastrophic levels.

But it is also controversial.

Some environmentalists worry CCS will help perpetuate the fossil-fuel status quo at the expense of the rapid, deep cuts in dirty energy use needed to curb global warming, said Steve Clemmer, director of energy research at the Union of Concerned Scientists.

Transcend

Still, in the United States, CCS is beginning to transcend ideological leanings, he said on the sidelines of the CO2NNECT 2019 meeting.

The United States has half of the world's 18 large-scale CCS projects, according to the Global CCS Institute in Australia.

Clemmer said CCS had won backing in US states with fossil fuel industries and lobbies, as well as in greener states whose leaders want to address climate change.

In politically conservative North Dakota, Democratic senator **Heidi Heitkamp** introduced a successful bill for a national tax credit expansion last year aimed at promoting use of the technology.

Similarly, sponsors of this week's meeting included environmental groups such as the National Audubon Society, but also fossil fuel companies like Occidental Petroleum.

"Carbon capture has recently caught the eye of a curious coalition of interests," said David Livingston, a deputy director at the Atlantic Council, a bipartisan think tank.

"Their interests overlap," he added.

The Carbon Capture Coalition, which consists of more than 60 companies, labor unions and green groups, launched a blueprint at the gathering, calling for additional policies to boost CCS.

Co-director Brad Crabtree said he hoped it would continue to resonate across party lines.

The "foundational first step" of a tax credit expansion last year needed to be followed by a wider set of policies to accelerate the technology's deployment at scale, he added.

Any US industrial facility that injects CO2 into an oil field before 2024 is eligible for the higher tax credit. So far the program's success has relied heavily on power plants, which produce nearly 30 percent of US carbon emissions.

Projects

Crabtree expects more projects will soon be dedicated to storing CO2 emissions from other industries such as gas processing and cement and chemical production.

The "policy blueprint" from the Carbon Capture Coalition called for additional tax incentives and research funding.

It largely reflects measures in bills with bipartisan support that are already before lawmakers.

Chief among these, the "USE IT Act", co-sponsored by Democratic and Republican members of Congress, seeks support for CO2 pipelines and funding for research to develop technology that sucks CO2 from the air.

So-called "direct air capture", which pulls gas directly from the atmosphere, is an emerging field with only a handful of players.

"The more the costs go down, the more projects are built, and you get this virtuous circle," said Crabtree.

Beefed-up backing from the US government for CCS is as crucial as other initiatives to cut planet-warming emissions, from planting forests to setting up wind farms, said Julio Friedmann, a senior research scholar at Columbia University.

The International Energy Agency says CCS will be needed to cut 14 percent of the emissions that have to be abated by 2060 to limit a global rise in average temperatures to below 2°C (3.6°F) above pre-industrial times.

Also:

THE HAGUE: A group of environmental activists tried to disrupt Royal Dutch Shell's annual shareholder meeting on Tuesday, calling for this year's gathering to be the company's last.

Around 20 activists from Dutch environmental action group Code Rood (Code Red) dressed in red jumpsuits held up banners with the slogan "shut down fossil power" and jeered at passing shareholders as they stood outside the energy giant's meeting in the seaside town of Scheveningen near The Hague.

Inside the venue a spokeswoman for Code Red, **Talissa Soto**, addressed the board, saying Shell's business cannot be reconciled with global warming and the only solution is for its business model "to become history."

"We will tax you, regulate you, split you up... today you are witnessing the last-ever Shell AGM," she said.

Shell CEO **Ben van Beurden** told the meeting that the company wanted to do the right thing, but the energy industry could not work alone.

"Our company wants to be on the right side of history and we are doing everything that is needed, but we cannot do it alone and as a matter of fact even the entire energy industry cannot do it on its own," he said.



Flooding in Kingfisher, Okla is pictured on May 21. Flooding following heavy rains was an issue across the state. (AP)

Storms in Midwest leave string of tornadoes, flooding

Dangerous storms left a string of more than 30 tornadoes across the central US, damaging homes in Oklahoma, demolishing a racetrack grandstand in Missouri and inundating the region with water over a short period.

Two deaths, both in Missouri, were blamed on the severe weather that started in the Southern Plains Monday night and moved to the northeast. Missouri and parts of Illinois and Arkansas were in the cross-hairs Tuesday. By Wednesday, the storm will move into Great Lakes region, where it will weaken. But another storm system was gathering steam for later this week, potentially covering an area

from Texas to Chicago, according to the National Weather Service.

Patrick Marsh, warning coordination meteorologist for the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Storm Prediction Center, said eyewitnesses reported 26 tornadoes Monday and six more Tuesday. One, near Tulsa, was a mile (1.61 kilometer) wide with winds in the range of 111 mph (179 kph) to 135 mph (217 kph).

"It certainly isn't anything to mess with," Marsh said.

A tornado early Tuesday near Tulsa International Airport injured one person and damaged about a dozen

homes. The airport was unscathed, but passengers were moved into shelters for about 30 minutes and several flights were delayed.

Tulsa Area Emergency Management spokeswoman Kim MacLeod said crews rescued a man who was pinned under a tree. In Arkansas, crews were working Tuesday afternoon to free a woman trapped under a tree topped by strong winds. Arkansas Department of Emergency Management spokeswoman Melody Daniel said the woman was alert and talking.

Storms Monday evening flipped campers at Lucas Oil Speedway in

Hickory County, Missouri, injuring seven people, four of whom were taken to hospitals. The speedway's grandstand also was destroyed, forcing cancellation of racing this weekend that was expected to draw about 3,000 campers.

Another twister Tuesday afternoon hit a drive-thru wild animal park in southern Missouri. Webster County Emergency Management Director Tom Simmons said buildings were damaged at the Wild Animal Safari near Strafford, but there were no reports that people or animals were injured. All of the animals were accounted for. (AP)

Climate

Low-lying Bangladesh extremely vulnerable to climate change

Hospital boats keep healthcare afloat

DHAKA, May 22, (RTRS): Living on a secluded island in northern Bangladesh, several hours from the nearest hospital, Abdul Jalil believed he was destined to die blind.

That changed earlier this month when the 67-year-old underwent free cataract surgery on a ship moored next to his home.

"I can't wait for my eye bandage to come off," Jalil told the Thomson Reuters Foundation. "It's been so long since I last saw my son properly. I think I have forgotten how he looks."

Jalil lives on an island formed about two decades ago on the Jamuna River from sand and silt deposits.

These islands - known as chars in Bangladesh - are constantly changing shape as they erode and reform, a process that is quickening as a result of more extreme rainfall associated with climate change.

The erosion makes survival difficult for their residents - mostly poor farmers - and discourages building of permanent hospitals, researchers say.

But floating hospital ships, run by a non-governmental organisation and equipped with medical facilities and doctors, now provide free treatment in the chars - a system that might be a model for other nations hit by worsening climate threats.

Without the ship, the char's residents must hire a boat and endure a day-long journey to the nearest town hospital, said Kazi Golam Rasul, head

of health at Friendship, the NGO.

"They have to spend a lot of time and money to arrange a simple doctor's visit. It discourages them. That's why many residents visit hospitals only when the disease or pain becomes really bad. That is very dangerous," said Rasul.

The NGO currently runs two ships and is in the process of building five more floating hospitals with the help of the King Abdullah Foundation, an organisation started by the former Saudi monarch.

Ships

After five years, the new ships will be handed over to the Bangladesh government, which believes Friendship's method of reaching people in remote areas needs to expand.

"This is a viable strategy to get to people who are hard to reach and have no access to medical services," said Nawsher Ahmed Sikder, a civil servant from the Ministry of Finance.

Low-lying Bangladesh is extremely vulnerable to climate change and researchers say people living on the chars, far away from the mainland, are at the forefront of experiencing climate impacts, from flooding and storms to worsening erosion.

According to government records, at least 466 families living on chars in Gaibandha in northern Bangladesh lost their homes due to river erosion last year and 67 were forced to move.

In all, about 10 million people live on chars in Bangladesh according to the National Char Alliance, an advocacy group.

"It's a matter of life and death. A farmer invests all his money in a land so that he can get crops. Climate change takes that away from him. Everything he has saved goes away in a second," said Runa Khan, who founded Friendship in 2002.

In the last two decades, she said, her organisation has noticed diseases occurring outside the seasons they were once restricted to.

To tackle these issues, Khan developed a three-tier system that, as well as bringing patients to the ships, sends medical teams to the chars for check-ups and trains women from the islands to spread awareness and prescribe medicines.

"We realised that you cannot have a healthcare system which is the same in the cities and these unreachable areas. You have to change the system with the available resources and socioeconomic capability of the people," said Khan. It is a model that has been lauded both by the government and climate change experts.

"The concept and practice of providing health facilities to remote communities through a hospital ship was a welcome development," said climate scientist Saleemul Huq, who also praised the plan for the government to take over the project.



This picture taken on May 8 shows two newly born Chacoan peccaries in their enclosure at the Prague Zoo, Czech Republic. Prague Zoo says two Chacoan peccaries have been born in the park in May for the first time, a welcome step in efforts to save a species that was once considered long extinct. (AP)



Lakkotrypis



Yeo

Discovery

India launches satellite: Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) said on Wednesday that it has successfully launched an indigenously built earth observation satellite named RISAT-2B.

The Indian Department of Space said in a statement soon after the launch that the India's Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle (PSLV-C46) today launched the RISAT-2B satellite successfully from Satish Dhawan Space Centre located at Sriharikota in the south Indian state of Andhra Pradesh at 5:30 local time. "The launch vehicle lifted-off at 05:30 local time from the first launch pad and injected RISAT-2B into an orbit of 556 km, about 15 minutes and 25 seconds after lift-off.

After separation, solar arrays of RISAT-2B were deployed automatically and ISRO Telemetry Tracking and Command Network at Bengaluru assumed control of the satellite," the statement said.

"RISAT-2B is a radar imaging earth observation satellite weighing about 615 kg. The satellite is intended to provide services in the field of agriculture, forestry and disaster management," the statement added.

ISRO Chairman Dr K. Sivan congratulated the teams involved in the mission while stating, "with this launch, PSLV lofts 50 tonnes to space by launching 354 satellites, including national, student and foreign satellites."

In a media statement earlier, Sivan said that the satellite would help the security authorities to track movements of the militants and infiltrators on the India-Pakistan border as it is capable of capturing accurate pictures in all the weathers. (KUNA)

Gas drilling over 24 months: Cyprus' energy minister says energy companies will drill in search of natural gas in waters off the east Mediterranean island nation's southern coast at eight separate sites over

the next two years.

Georgios Lakkotrypis said Tuesday that exploratory drilling would take place at six of those sites, while the remaining two

would be to confirm gas deposits already discovered there.

Lakkotrypis didn't specify the exact locations where the drilling would take place.



A female adult ichthyosaur with the remains of two juveniles from the Lower Jurassic (circa 184 million years ago) is displayed during a media opportunity at Christie's in London on May 21. The ichthyosaur estimated at 300,000-500,000 UK pounds (381,040-635,066 US dollars) will go for auction in the Science and Natural History Auction on May 24. (AP)

He said that drilling would start at the end of this year or early 2020.

Energy companies including ExxonMobil, Total and Eni are licensed to conduct a hydrocarbons search off Cyprus. Gas has been discovered at three locations.

Cyprus accuses Turkey of violating its sovereign rights by attempting to drill in waters where it has exclusive economic rights. (AP)

Some scrap back to source: Malaysia, which has become the dumping ground for the world's plastic waste, will send back non-recyclable plastic scrap to the developed countries that sent it there, its environment minister said on Tuesday.

Malaysia last year became the leading alternative destination for plastic scrap after China banned imports of such waste, disrupting the flow of more than 7 million tonnes of plastic scrap a year.

Dozens of recycling factories cropped up in Malaysia, many without an operating license, and residents complained of environmental damage.

Most of the plastic scrap coming into the country is contaminated and low-quality plastic from developed countries that is non-recyclable.

Now Malaysia has begun sending back the waste to its country of origin, said **Yeo Bee Yin**, Malaysia's minister of energy, technology, science, climate change and environment. (RTRS)