



BRUSSELS (Reuters) -- Operations at the port of Antwerp, one of Europe's biggest container ports, were seriously impacted on Tuesday as hundreds of farmers on tractors blocked the roads around the port to demand better pay and working conditions, officials said. The protest follows a large number of similar actions by angry farmers in France, Belgium, the Netherlands and beyond, as farmers also demand looser environmental rules and better protection against cheap imports. "Operations are heavily disrupted," Stephan Van Fraechem, the director of the association of port companies Aljafport YOKA, told Reuters. "No freight can be delivered or picked up, as trucks are halted, while employees are only being allowed in after a long wait." Van Fraechem said this was costing companies working in the port millions of euros "for a conflict they play no part in."

SYDNEY (Reuters) -- Large chunks of Australia's Victoria state lost power on Tuesday afternoon when a major power plant shut down because a storm knocked out parts of the state's electricity transmission network. AGL's Loy Yang A power station, responsible for about a third of the state's power, was forced to shut down on Tuesday afternoon after several towers along a major section of the state's transmission network collapsed in bad weather. More than 500,000 homes or businesses had lost power, state energy minister Lily D'Ambrosio said in a social media post. As the plant shut down, electricity prices spiked across the state to their maximum of \$16,600 per megawatt hour, up from around \$200, according to data from the Australian Energy Market Operator (AEMO). The failure comes amid repeated warnings from AEMO that urgent investment is required to ensure power supply remains reliable as the country's fleet of aging coal-fired power plants are retired.

WASHINGTON (Reuters) -- About half of Americans think President Joe Biden got special treatment when federal prosecutors decided last week they would not prosecute him for allegedly mishandling classified documents, according to a new Reuters/Ipsos poll. Some 53% of respondents, including 29% of Democrats, in the four-day poll which closed on Monday, agree with a statement that "Biden received special treatment because he is the U.S. president." About half - or 46% - of respondents said they were at least somewhat familiar with U.S. Special Counsel Robert Hur's comments that prosecuting Biden would be tough because Biden, 81, could present himself to the jury "as a sympathetic, well-meaning, elderly man with a poor memory." Biden has blasted Hur's report which suggested the president was suffering memory lapses.

YEREVAN (AFP) -- Arch-foes Armenia and Azerbaijan accused each other on Tuesday of opening fire on their volatile border, with Yerevan saying Azerbaijani forces killed four soldiers in the southern region of Siunik. Yerevan and Baku have fought two wars -- in 2020 and in the 1990s -- over the disputed Karabakh region, which Azerbaijan recaptured in a lightning offensive last year. "Four were killed and one injured as a result of fire on Armenian positions from Azerbaijani troops," the Armenian defense ministry said in a statement. The fighting occurred near the village of Nerkin Hand. Azerbaijan's border guards said this was a "riposte" to a "provocation" on Monday by Armenian troops that Baku said had injured one Azerbaijani soldier. Azerbaijan's defense ministry said Armenian troops had opened fire twice late Monday on Kokhanabli village in the Tovuz region.

NEW YORK CITY (Reuters) -- New York City police said they are searching for a gunman who opened fire on a subway train and station platform in the Bronx on Monday, killing one man and injuring five other people. Gunfire erupted on a northbound train as two groups of teenagers were fighting, New York Police Department (NYPD) officials said during a press conference outside the station where the violence took place. Someone from one of the groups then pulled out a gun. The first shot was fired inside the train, but all six people shot were on the platform outside the train when hit by bullets, police said. A 34-year-old man died while five others taken to hospitals sustained non-life threatening injuries. The victims ranged in age from 14 to 71, and included four males and two females.

STOCKHOLM (AP) -- Firefighters in Sweden were struggling for the second day on Tuesday to put out a blaze at a water park that's under construction at one of the country's biggest amusement centers. One park employee is missing and 16 people, mainly workers, were slightly injured. Authorities could not say what had caused the fire at the Oceana water park in the popular Liseberg amusement complex in Goteborg, Sweden's second-largest city. The fire broke out on Monday and spread over several water slides and the pool area. Svante Carlsson of the city's fire department said his firefighters have gotten the fire under control on Tuesday. There was "extensive damage and some parts of the structure have collapsed," he said, adding that he expects his crews "to be on the scene for some time."

Indian Police Attack Farmers Marching to New Delhi



Indian police fired tear gas and detained some farmers who tried to break barricades blocking their way to New Delhi in a protest march.

NEW DELHI (AP) -- Indian police on Tuesday used tear gas and detained some farmers who clashed with them and tried to break barricades blocking their way to New Delhi to demand guaranteed crop prices in a repeat of 2021 protests, when they camped on the capital's outskirts for more than a year.

Police dropped tear gas canisters on the protesting farmers from a drone at one of the border points in northern Haryana state that leads to New Delhi, where tens of thousands of farmers are headed on tractors and trucks.

Police have sealed multiple entry points into the capital with barriers of giant metal containers, barbed wire, spikes and cement blocks. The government has banned large gatherings in the capital and suspended internet service in some districts of neighboring Haryana state to prevent communication among the protesters.

The demonstration comes more than two years after Prime Minister Narendra Modi withdrew controversial agriculture laws that had triggered the earlier protests, in which tens of thousands of farmers camped outside the capital through a harsh winter and a devastating COVID-19 surge.

The farmers, who began their march in northern Haryana and Punjab states, are asking for a guaranteed minimum support price for all farm produce. The government protects agricultural pro-

ducers against any sharp fall in farm prices by announcing a minimum purchase price for certain essential crops at the beginning of the sowing season, taking into account the cost of production.

Farmers are also pressing the government to meet its promise to double their income and waive their loans. They say they will protest in New Delhi until their demands are met.

The withdrawal of the agricultural laws in November 2021 was seen as a major retreat by the Modi government, which was shocked in January that year when tens of thousands of farmers stormed the historic Red Fort in New Delhi.

After withdrawing the laws, the government said it would set up a panel of farmers and government officials to find ways to ensure support prices for all farm produce. Multiple meetings since then have made no progress.

The current march comes just months before a national election in which Modi is widely expected to win a third term.

The protests could pose a significant challenge for Modi and his governing Bharatiya Janata Party as farmers form the most influential voting bloc in India and politicians have long considered it unwise to alienate them. The stakes are high in Haryana and Punjab, where farmers form a sizeable population, as the two states send 23 lawmakers to India's lower house of Parliament.

Study: Terrorism in Africa Rose 100,000% Under U.S. War



Soldiers conduct close quarters combat training with U.S. Special Forces advisors in Agadez, Niger on April 13, 2018.

WASHINGTON (Responsible Statecraft) -- Deaths from terrorism in Africa have skyrocketed more than 100,000 percent during the U.S. war on terror according to a new study by Africa Center for Strategic Studies, a Pentagon research institution. These findings contradict claims by U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM) that it is thwarting terrorist threats on the continent and promoting security and stability.

Throughout all of Africa, the State Department counted a total of just nine terrorist attacks in 2002 and 2003, resulting in a combined 23 casualties. At that time, the U.S. was just beginning a decades-long effort to provide billions of dollars in security assistance, train many thousands of African military personnel, set up dozens of outposts, dispatch its own commandos on a wide range of missions, create proxy forces, launch drone strikes, and even engage in ground combat with militants in Africa.

Most Americans, including members of Congress, are unaware of the extent of these operations -- or how little they have done to protect African lives.

Last year, fatalities from militant takfiri violence in Africa rose by 20 percent -- from 19,412 in 2022 to 23,322 -- reaching "a record level of lethal violence,"

according to the Africa Center. This represents almost a doubling in deaths since 2021 and a 101,300 percent jump since 2002-2003.

For decades, U.S. counter-terrorism efforts in Africa have been centered on two main fronts: Somalia and the West African Sahel. Each saw significant spikes in terrorism last year.

U.S. Special Operations forces were first dispatched to Somalia in 2002, followed by military aid, advisers, and private contractors.

Somalia saw, according to the Africa Center, "a 22-percent increase in fatalities in 2023 -- reaching a record high of 7,643 deaths." This represents a tripling of fatalities since 2020.

The findings are even more damning for the Sahel. In 2002 and 2003, the State Department counted a total of just nine terrorist attacks in Africa. Today, the nations of the West African Sahel are plagued by terrorist groups that have grown, evolved, splintered, and reconstituted themselves. Under the black banners of takfiri militancy, men on motorcycles -- wearing sunglasses and turbans and armed with AK-47s -- rumble into villages to impose their harsh brand of Sharia law and terrorize, assault, and kill civilians. Relentless attacks by these takfiris have destabilized Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger.

Russia Vows Very Tough Response if Assets Seized



The United States and its allies have blocked around \$300 billion of sovereign Russian assets in the West.

MOSCOW (Reuters) -- Russia warned the West on Tuesday that Moscow would be very tough if the United States and European Union seized hundreds of billions of dollars worth of Russian assets.

After President Vladimir Putin sent troops into Ukraine in 2022, the United States and its allies prohibited transactions with Russia's central bank and finance ministry, blocking around \$300 billion of sovereign Russian assets in the West.

The EU on Monday adopted a law to set aside windfall profits made on frozen Russian central bank as-

sets, it said on Monday, in a first concrete step towards the bloc's aim of using the money to finance the reconstruction of Ukraine.

"This is theft: It's the appropriation of something that doesn't belong to you," Russian Foreign Ministry Spokeswoman Maria Zakharova told Sputnik radio, TASS reported.

Zakharova said the response from Moscow would be "extremely tough" as Russia felt it was essentially dealing with thieves.

"Considering that our country has qualified this as theft, the attitude will be towards thieves," Zakh-

rova said. "Not as political manipulators, not as overplayed technologists, but as thieves."

Russia has said that if its property is seized then it will seize U.S., European and other assets in response.

Russia is preparing for a military confrontation with the West within the next decade and could be deterred by a counter build-up of armed forces, Estonia's Foreign Intelligence Service said on Tuesday.

The chief of the intelligence service said the assessment was based on Russian plans to double the number of forces stationed along its border with NATO members Finland and the Baltic States of Estonia, Lithuania and Latvia.

"Russia has chosen a path which is a long-term confrontation ... and the Kremlin is probably anticipating a possible conflict with NATO within the next decade or so," Kaupo Rosin told reporters at the release of Estonia's national security threats report.

A military attack by Russia is "highly unlikely" in the short term, he said, partly because Russia has to keep troops in Ukraine, and would remain unlikely if Russian buildup of forces was matched in Europe.

"If we are not prepared, the likelihood (of a military Russian attack) would be much higher than without any preparation," Rosin added.

Around 25,000 Police Deployed as Indonesia Goes to Polls



Workers load ballot boxes onto a truck to be distributed to polling stations ahead of Feb. 14 elections, in Medan, North Sumatra, Indonesia, Feb. 12, 2024.

JAKARTA (Reuters) -- Indonesian authorities were making final preparations ahead of Wednesday's election, with around 25,000 police set to ensure security in a contest seen as a test of democratic gains made since the end of authoritarian rule 25 years ago.

Outgoing President Joko Widodo has presided over steady growth and relative stability in the past decade in the mineral-rich Group of 20 economy of 270 million people, establishing it as a future base for multinationals in the electric vehicle supply chain.

Still, Widodo, who is widely known as Jokowi, has in the run-up to the Feb. 14 presidential election faced criticism over his perceived political meddling and push to

establish a political dynasty.

He has not explicitly endorsed any of the three presidential candidates but has made highly publicized appearances with controversial former special forces commander Prabowo Subianto, and his eldest son is running on the same ticket for vice president.

Two opinion surveys last week projected Defense Minister Prabowo, who is making his third run to be president, could secure more than 50% of the votes on Wednesday, allowing him to win in a single round. Rivals Anies Baswedan and Ganjar Pranowo were seen at least 27 and 31 points behind him respectively.

Indonesia has entered a cooling-off period until voting day, with candidates barred from campaign-

ing. Running an election is a gargantuan task in Indonesia. The archipelago of more than 17,000 islands stretches across three times zones and a distance similar to across the United States.

Election officials have delivered ballot boxes and papers to far-flung regions, in some cases travelling hours by boat, helicopter or ox-drawn carts.

The weather agency has warned about the risk of extreme weather in West Java on polling day, media reported. Meanwhile, the election commission has postponed voting in ten villages in the Karanganyar district in Central Java due to flooding.

Jokowi's tacit backing of Prabowo has led to accusations he has flouted election rules, which he rejects.

In Indonesia, sitting presidents can campaign for candidates providing they do not use state resources and must take official leave to do so. Incumbents have typically been neutral.

The presidential office has denied political meddling by Jokowi.

Hundreds of students held noisy street protests on Monday to protest against what they see as democratic backsliding under Jokowi, a former furniture salesman who seemed to offer a clean break from the military and political elite.

In 1998, huge student protests fuelled unrest that led to the fall of former strongman leader Suharto and helped usher in democracy.

Vegetation at Greenland Ice Sheet Alarms Experts

GREENLAND (Guardian) -- Significant areas of Greenland's melted ice sheet are now producing vegetation, risking increased greenhouse gas emissions, rising sea levels and instability of the landscape.

A study has documented the change since the 1980s and shows that large areas of ice have been replaced with barren rock, wetlands and shrub growth, creating a change in environment.

Analysis of satellite records has shown that over the past three decades an estimated 11,000 sq miles of Greenland's ice sheet and glaciers have melted, to an area equivalent to the size of Albania and amounting to 1.6% of its total ice cover.

As ice has retreated, the amount of land with vegetation growing on it has increased by 33,774 sq miles, more than twice the area covered when the study began.

The findings show a near-quadrupling of wetlands across Greenland, which are a source of methane emissions.

The greatest increase in dense wetland vegetation occurred in the vicinity of Kangerlussuaq in the south-west and in isolated areas in the north-east.

The scientists say warmer air temperatures are causing

the ice to retreat and since the 1970s the region has been heating up at double the global average rate. On Greenland, the average annual air temperatures between 2007 and 2012 were 3C warmer than the average between 1979 and 2000.

According to the findings, there are signs that the increased vegetation is resulting in further ice loss.

Jonathan Carrivick, an Earth scientist at the University of Leeds and a co-author of the study, published in the journal Scientific Reports, said: "We have seen signs that the loss of ice is triggering other reactions which will result in further loss of ice and further 'greening' of Greenland, where shrinking ice exposes bare rock that is then colonized by tundra and eventually shrub.

"At the same time, water released from the melting ice is moving sediment and silt, and that eventually forms wetlands and fenlands."

Dr Michael Grimes, the lead author of the report, said: "The expansion of vegetation, occurring in tandem with the retreat of glaciers and the ice sheet, is significantly altering the flow of sediments and nutrients into coastal waters.