

International

# Australian towns among hottest spots on Earth as heatwave sizzles

Past four days among the country's top 10 warmest on record

**SYDNEY:** Australian towns were among the hottest places on Earth this week as a severe heatwave hit the continent's southeast, with forecasters warning of more record-breaking temperatures before the weekend. The past four days were among the country's top 10 warmest on record, with temperatures nearing 50 degrees Celsius (122 degrees Fahrenheit) in some spots, the Bureau of Meteorology said yesterday.

"With South Australia breaking some all-time records yesterday, it would certainly put this region as one of the warmest parts of the world yesterday, if not the warmest," the bureau's senior meteorologist Philip Perkins said. "The places that broke records yesterday are already warmer at this time today as they were yesterday." High temperatures are not unusual in Australia during its arid southern hemisphere summer, with bushfires a common occurrence. But climate change has pushed up land and sea temperatures and led to more extremely hot days and severe fire seasons.

Among the towns in South Australia state experiencing their hottest temperatures on record Tuesday was tiny Tarcoola in the region's far north, which reached 49 degrees Celsius. The city of Port Augusta recorded a temperature of 48.9 degrees Celsius, almost one degree higher than its previous record set on February 7, 2009 — the same day Victoria state endured the devastating "Black Saturday" bushfires

that left 173 dead in the nation's worst natural disaster.

**'Pressure cooker'**

The desert town of Coober Pedy — where some residents live underground to escape the harsh conditions — equaled its temperature record of 47.4 degrees Celsius. In the state's capital Adelaide, where cycling's Tour Down Under and the cricket One Day International between Australia and India were being held, athletes sweltered through a maximum temperature of 41.9 degree Celsius.

Overnight temperatures were also set to remain high, before a rapid change to cooler conditions from late Thursday when a cold front currently over the Southern Ocean sweeps across southern Australia, Perkins said. "Everything's sort of a bit of a pressure cooker at the moment, and everything's getting hotter and more humid and we're all doing a slow clap waiting for this change to come through," he added.

Australia's creatures, already battered by a drought plaguing the east of the vast continent, are also feeling the heat. Up to one million fish are believed to have died along the banks of a major river system, with authorities warning of more deaths to come as temperatures soar. The New South Wales state government said it would install aerators in some waterways to keep the levels of oxygen up for fish to reduce the likelihood of more mass deaths. —AFP



MELBOURNE: A child is carried in front of a mist fan to cool down from the heat on day one of the Australian Open tennis tournament. — AFP

## Canada asks China for clemency for drug trafficker

**MONTREAL:** Canada urged Beijing on Tuesday to grant clemency to a Canadian sentenced to death for drug trafficking, after his sentence reignited a diplomatic dispute that began last month. Ottawa has warned its citizens about the risk of "arbitrary enforcement" of laws in China following a court's sentencing of Robert Lloyd Schellenberg, 36, to death on Monday, increasing a previous 15-year prison term.

The sentence came during a clash between Ottawa and Beijing over Canada's arrest in December of Meng Wanzhou, chief financial officer of telecom giant Huawei, on a US extradition request related to Iran sanctions violations. "We have already spoken with China's ambassador to Canada and requested clemency" for Schellenberg, Canada's Foreign Minister Chrystia Freeland told reporters in Sainte-Hyacinthe, Quebec.

Earlier, Beijing said Prime Minister Justin Trudeau had made "irresponsible remarks" for saying China chose to "arbitrarily apply" death penalties. Freeland recalled Canada's long-standing opposition to capital punishment. "We believe it is inhumane and inappropriate, and wherever the death penalty is considered with regard to a Canadian we speak out against it," she said. Asked if Beijing would consider the clemency request,



DALIAN, China: This photograph taken and released by the Intermediate Peoples' Court of Dalian on January 14, 2019 shows Canadian Robert Lloyd Schellenberg (C) during his retrial on drug trafficking charges in the court. — AFP

the foreign ministry said China is a rule of law country.

Citing the Chinese constitution, ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying told reporters yesterday that the court and procuratorate "exercise independent judicial authority and prosecutorial power according to the law and will not be interfered with by other administrative organs". Human rights groups say Chinese courts are not independent and can be influenced by the Communist Party.

Beijing had earlier said Prime Minister Justin Trudeau had made "irresponsible remarks" for saying China chose to "arbitrarily apply" death penalties. In a move observers see as retaliation over the Huawei

case, Chinese authorities detained two other Canadian citizens — a former diplomat and a business consultant — on suspicion of endangering national security.

The timing and swiftness of Schellenberg's sentence, and the inclusion of new evidence, raised suspicion among observers. Human Rights Watch executive director Kenneth Roth said China was "playing hostage politics." In response to Canada's travel advisory on China, Beijing issued a similar response, urging its nationals to "travel cautiously." China executes one or two foreigners every year — nearly all for drug offences, according to John Kamm, director of the US-based Dui Hua Foundation rights group. — AFP

## One in three UN employees are harassed: Survey

**UNITED NATIONS:** A third of United Nations employees have reported experiencing sexual harassment at the world body over the last two years, according to the findings of the first-ever survey on such misconduct released Tuesday. UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres told staff in a letter that the study contained "some sobering statistics and evidence of what needs to change" to improve the workplace at the United Nations.

One in three respondents, or 33 percent, reported at least one instance of sexual harassment in the past two years, but that figure climbed to 38.7 percent for those who reported some form of sexual harassment during their time at the United Nations. The most common type of sexual harassment were sexual stories or jokes that were offensive, or offensive remarks about appearance, body or sexual activities.

UN employees were also targeted for unwelcome attempts to draw them into discussion about sexual matters, offensive gestures and touching, according to the survey carried out by Deloitte in November. Two out of three harassers were men and one in four were supervisors or managers. Nearly one in 10 harassers were senior leaders, according to the survey. The survey had a moderately low response rate of 17 percent, with some 30,364 staff providing answers to a confidential questionnaire on line.

In a letter to staff, Guterres said the survey findings on the prevalence of sexual harassment were comparable to other organizations, but that the United Nations, which champions equality, dignity and human rights, must set a high standard. In February, the United Nations launched a 24-hour helpline for staff to report sexual harassment and UN investigators were tasked with addressing all complaints. Guterres has vowed to enforce a zero-tolerance policy for sexual harassment. The head of the UNAIDS agency, Michel Sidibe, last month announced he was stepping down after a review of his management style found that he had enabled a culture of harassment, including sexual harassment, at the Geneva-based UN agency. — AFP

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