



Heavy snowfall, bitter cold bring chaos to Germany and Britain

Desperate search for survivors after glacier disaster in India

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Biden, Modi speak of climate, values in first talks

US seeks to deepen close relationship with India

WASHINGTON: US President Joe Biden signaled he would seek to deepen the close US relationship with India in his first talks with Prime Minister Narendra Modi as he added climate change and "democratic" values to the agenda. Biden's telephone call marked a continuation of the upbeat tone of his predecessor Donald Trump, who paid a state visit to India a year ago on his last foreign trip as his administration saw a partner in its tough stance on China. But Biden also raised climate change, which the new US leader has elevated to a top priority amid the planet's rapidly warming temperatures. Biden and Modi committed to "work closely together to win the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic, renew their partnership on climate change, rebuild the global economy in a way that benefits the people of both countries and stand together against the scourge of global terrorism," the White House said in a statement. In New Delhi, the prime minister's office said Modi welcomed Biden's raising of climate ambitions and rejoining of the Paris accord, from which Trump withdrew.

It said that Modi looked forward to participating in a climate summit that Biden plans to call in April. India is the third largest emitter of carbon dioxide responsible for climate change after China and the United States, and historically has argued that it is unfair for it to be held to the same rules as developed nations. The White House said Biden had "underscored his desire to defend democratic institutions and norms around the world and noted that a shared commitment to democratic values is the bedrock for the US-India relationship." India enjoys broad support in the United States but has come under growing criticism from some lawmakers in Biden's Democratic Party as Modi pursues his nationalist agenda, including revoking the statehood of Kashmir. India in recent days has drawn additional scrutiny from prominent figures including pop superstar Rihanna and climate activist Greta Thunberg over internet blackouts around New Delhi, where protesting farmers have been camped out for more than two months.



WASHINGTON, DC: In this file photo taken on September 30, 2014, US Vice President Joe Biden speaks with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi alongside US Secretary of State John Kerry during a luncheon at the US State Department in Washington, DC. —AFP

The White House said Biden also has a close relationship with its neighbor, also known as Myanmar, maintaining contact with its military even as Western nations shun it on human rights grounds. —AFP

No baby boom in China as births fall further in 2020

BEIJING: China's number of registered births in 2020 dropped by nearly a third from the total births reported the year before, in the latest sign that relaxations in the country's strict family planning policy are failing to spark a baby boom. After decades of a "one-child policy", Beijing changed the rules in 2016 to allow families to have two children as fears grew about China's fast-ageing population and shrinking workforce. Figures from the Public Security Ministry released Monday showed there were 10.04 million registered births in 2020, which is 15 percent down from the figure of registered births reported early last year for 2019. In the same month, the official statistics bureau reported a higher figure of 14.65 million babies born in 2019 — more than 30 percent above the latest birth data reported this week. The data also points to a fourth consecutive year birth numbers declined.

The number of registered births is typically lower than the actual number of births later announced in China, as not all parents register their children immediately. The gender balance was 52.7 percent boys and 47.3 percent girls, according to the data. One user on China's Twitter-like Weibo platform noted the birth figure was "lower than the number of people taking the college entrance examination", adding that ageing was going to become more serious in decades to come. Another called the low rate "the biggest crisis the Chinese nation is facing". China introduced the one-child policy in the late 1970s in a dramatic effort to slow rapid population growth, before reversing it in 2016. But the change has not yet resulted in a baby boom, with empowered Chinese women often delaying or avoiding childbirth and young couples blaming rising costs and insufficient policy support for families. —AFP

Qatar says ready to help Lebanon when new govt formed

BEIRUT: Qatar's foreign minister yesterday said his country was ready to help kick-start Lebanon's flailing economy, but only if its deeply divided political class agreed on a new government. "Under our policy, we only provide financial help through economic projects... that will make a difference to the country's economy," Qatar's Foreign Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al-Thani said during a visit to Beirut. But "this demands there be an independ-

ent government to work with," he said at a press conference after meeting Lebanon's president. "As soon as a government is formed, Qatar will be ready to study all the options" and only then discuss "a comprehensive economic program to support Lebanon", he said. Lebanon is locked in its worst economic crisis in decades and desperately needs international aid, but donors have conditioned financial help on an independent cabinet enacting sweeping reforms. The country's politicians have failed to agree on a new government since the previous cabinet stepped down after a monster August 4 blast at the Beirut port that killed more than 200 people and ravaged large parts of the city. Two visits to the country by French President Emmanuel Macron have failed to bring the various sides together.

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