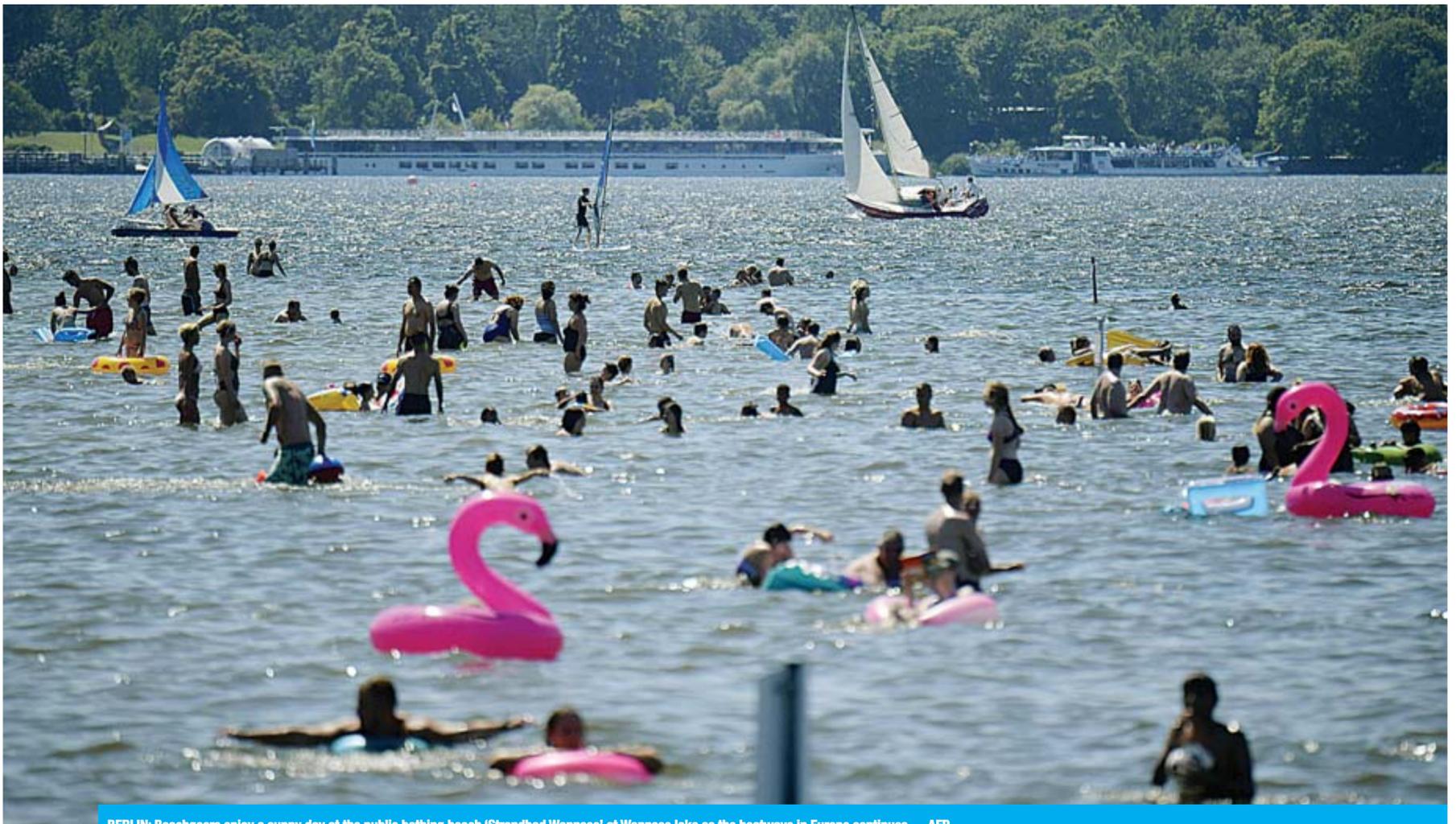




Canada takes garbage back from Philippines

‘Pandemonium’ in Panmunjom: Kim and Trump hasty DMZ date



BERLIN: Beachgoers enjoy a sunny day at the public bathing beach ‘Strandbad Wannsee’ at Wannsee lake as the heatwave in Europe continues. —AFP

Hotter than Death Valley: Europe burns

Wildfires burn fields, homes, cars in France and Spain

PARIS: Wildfires burned tracts of land in France and Spain at the weekend as Europe sweltered in record-breaking temperatures that pushed the mercury towards all-time highs yesterday in Germany, killing at least seven people. Temperatures in France’s southern Gard region hit an all-time high of 45.9 degrees Celsius (114.62 degrees F) on Friday - hotter than in California’s Death Valley - sparking scores of fires that burned 550 hectares of land and destroyed several homes and vehicles.

One man died while competing on Saturday in a cycling race in the southwestern Ariège region, in the foothills of the Pyrenees. The 53-year-old crashed after feeling unwell, local public prosecutor Laurent Dumaine said yesterday, adding police were investigating the precise cause of death.

The race was called off after several participants were taken sick due to the heat, organisers said. Another cyclist died in the southern region of Vaucluse, with authorities attributing the man’s collapse to the heatwave. Meteorologists say a weakening of the high-level jet stream is increasingly causing weather systems to stall and leading summer temperatures to soar. Five of Europe’s hottest summers in the last 500 years have happened in this century.

Some 25 out of around 90 administrative departments in France have adopted limits on water use including for agriculture, which could affect harvest yields for summer crops like maize that are often irrigated. “The heatwave has also hit the vineyards of Herault, widespread damage observed,” Jerome Despey, a wine producer in France’s southwestern Herault region and head of the local chamber of agriculture said on Twitter, posting photos of shrivelled grapes.

Tensions over Iran nuke accord: What are the stakes?

TEHRAN: Nearly four years after it was agreed, the 2015 Iran nuclear deal appears to be under serious threat.

How did we reach this point?

The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) was concluded on July 14, 2015 in Vienna between Iran and the P5+1 (the five permanent members of the UN Security Council - China, Britain, France, Russia and the US - plus Germany). It sought to bring to an end 12 years of international crisis surrounding a potentially nuclear-armed Iran. Under the terms of the deal, Iran committed never to acquire the atomic bomb and to accept drastic limits on its nuclear programme in exchange for a partial lifting of international sanctions that had been strangling its economy.

Iran also submitted to unprecedented inspections by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). But US President Donald Trump’s unilateral

Extreme risk
 In Spain, 40 out of 50 regions have been put under weather alert with seven of them considered to be an extreme risk, the national weather agency said. Temperatures in Girona, in northeastern Spain, reached 43.9 degrees on Friday - the highest ever recorded in the Catalan city. Most of the wildfires that hit Spain in recent days were stabilized over the weekend, but firefighters were struggling to control a blaze in the central provinces of Toledo and Madrid, that has burned more than 20 sq km since Friday. Temperatures eased slightly yesterday although the Spanish national meteorological agency predicted the mercury could stay over 40 degrees Celsius in some parts of the country, in particular in the northeast. At least seven heat-related deaths have been reported in recent days: In addition to the two French cyclists, two people have died in Spain and three in Italy.

Race against global warming
 Germany’s weather service warned of “extreme” heat yesterday, forecasting peak temperatures of up to 39 degrees Celsius from Saxony in the east to the upper Rhine in the west. That’s just below an all-time high of 40.3 Celsius. In Frankfurt, an IronMan endurance event went ahead after organisers issued an advisory to the 3,000 competitors to caution them over the dangers of getting overheated.

They provided 9,000 litres of electrolytic drinks and 30,000 litres of water to keep athletes hydrated; and 12 tonnes of ice to cool them down. “It felt like a race against global warming - you could have fried an egg on my head,” said second-placed finisher Sebastian Kienle. The World Meteorological Organization said this week

withdrawal from the deal on May 8, 2018 - and subsequent sanctions - have deprived Iran of the economic benefits it expected and plunged it into recession. Exactly a year after the US withdrew, Tehran announced it no longer felt beholden to two Vienna commitments. It gave the remaining parties 60 days to help it bypass US sanctions, or it would withdraw from two further commitments.

What commitments has Iran renounced?

On May 8, President Hassan Rouhani said that Iran would temporarily cease to limit its stocks of heavy water and low-enriched uranium to 130 tonnes and 300 kilogrammes (660 pounds) respectively. Tehran has not yet breached these Vienna ceilings, but it does appear to be flirting with the uranium limit. An Iranian official said Friday that the national stock had hit 297.2 kilogrammes.

What are the other threats?

Iran has threatened to start enriching uranium above the agreed maximum purification level of 3.67 percent from July 7. Weapons-grade levels are about 90 percent. It has also threatened to resume building from that date a heavy water reactor - capable of one day producing plutonium - in Arak in central Iran, a project that had been mothballed under the deal.



CENICIENTOS, Spain: A Canadair drops water over a wildfire on the outskirts of Cenicientos in central Spain yesterday. —AFP

that 2019 was on track to be among the world’s hottest years on record, which would make 2015-2019 the hottest five-year period.

The European heatwave was “absolutely consistent” with extremes linked to the impact of greenhouse gas emissions, according to the WMO. Addressing thou-

What does Iran want?

The threats are “above all a call for help by Iran to its partners - to escape the growing difficulties which American sanctions have heaped on the economy”, Francois Nicoullaud, a former French ambassador to Iran, told AFP. For Clement Therme, a researcher on Iran at the International Institute for Strategic Studies, Tehran seeks “primarily to preserve” the Vienna deal itself. “The main problem for Iran is to avoid economic collapse... without provoking a war.” But a military conflict “is a real probability due to the effects of Washington’s strategy”, Therme told AFP.

Is there a danger of proliferation?

“As long as Iran does not get close to a threshold of a tonne of lightly enriched uranium, there is no pressing concern”, Nicoullaud said. But if Iran “amassed, for example, a stock of 200 to 300 kilogrammes of uranium enriched to nearly 20 percent, there would be cause for great concern”. But even under that scenario, Nicoullaud noted, Iran could still not be deemed to be within months of being able to detonate a nuclear device.

And a growing stock of heavy water “presents no danger of proliferation, at least for many years”, he said. The retired diplomat also pointed out that Iran

sands of people in St Peter’s Square for a Sunday address and blessing, Pope Francis said he was praying for those suffering most from the heat wave - the sick, the old, construction workers and those who had to labour outdoors. “May no-one be abandoned or exploited,” he said. —Reuters

has not indicated it will expel IAEA inspectors, so “the evolution of the (nuclear) programme can still be observed”. For Therme, a relaunch of the programme would be “above all dangerous for Iran’s population because it would drive the country into total isolation and even greater impoverishment of the people.”

What are the risks beyond July 7?

If the remaining co-signatories are unable to ease the impact of US sanctions by July 7, “it is probable that Iran will follow through on its threats”, Nicoullaud warned. “But Iran’s partners, and particularly the Europeans, would have no interest in immediately sanctioning” the Islamic Republic, because this would immediately harden the situation, he observed.

Therme believes that the remaining signatories want “to avoid a war while giving respite to Iran’s economy”. “The perception of an imminent risk of an American war... could drive the Europeans, the Chinese and the Russians to provide guarantees to the Islamic Republic” on economic matters. Therme said the UAE, Qatar and Oman also favour de-escalation, which could further feed into a multilateral diplomatic effort based on common economic and security interests. —AFP