

International

China, US unveil surprise climate pact at COP26 summit

UN Chief Antonio Guterres welcomes US-China pact

GLASGOW: China and the United States on Wednesday vowed to work together to accelerate climate action this decade, in a surprise new pact in the face of global warming that is already wreaking disasters across the world. The announcement came as the crunch COP26 summit in Glasgow entered its pivotal final days, with negotiators wrestling over ways to limit global warming to 1.5-2 degrees Celsius from pre-industrial levels.

"This document contains strong statements about the alarming science, the emissions gap, and the urgent need to accelerate action to close that gap," US special envoy John Kerry told reporters in a surprise announcement.

"It commits to a series of important actions now this decade when it is needed." The plan is light on concrete targets but heavy on political symbolism at a conference that began with the US and China—the world's two biggest emitters—seemingly at loggerheads. Last week US President Joe Biden criticised the decision of China's President Xi Jinping not to attend the Glasgow summit, saying China "walked away".

China hit back at the time, but ties appear to have thawed ahead of long-awaited bilateral talks next week. On Wednesday both US and China envoys stressed their countries' collaboration, saying they had agreed to put other differences aside to work on climate. "Both sides recognise that there is a gap between the current effort and the Paris Agreement goals so we will jointly strengthen climate action," Beijing's longtime climate envoy Xie Zhenhua said.

'Seriousness and urgency'

A document outlining the agreement includes a focus on lowering methane emissions, which Kerry described as the "single fastest and most ef-

fective way to limit warming". It says the two sides will meet regularly to "address the climate crisis".

The document also stresses the need to boost emissions efforts in the short term, with scientists warning that emissions efforts before 2030 are crucial for halting catastrophic global warming. The declaration said both countries "recognise the seriousness and urgency of the climate crisis". "They are committed to tackling it through their respective accelerated actions in the critical decade of the 2020s," the document said. China and US are the two largest emitters in the world and together account for nearly 40 percent of all carbon pollution.

The US has already said it plans to be carbon neutral by 2050, while China announced its intention last month to reach net-zero emissions before 2060. The 2015 Paris climate accord commits nations to work towards limiting global temperature rises to between 1.5C and 2C through sweeping emissions cuts.

The United Nations said that all countries emissions cutting plans, taken together, were currently set to warm Earth 2.7C by 2100. UN Chief Antonio Guterres welcomed the US-China pact. "Tackling the climate crisis requires international collaboration and solidarity, and this is an important step in the right direction," he said on Twitter.

'No excuse'

Negotiators are in Glasgow to work out how to keep to the Paris Agreement degree limits, as countries across the world are battered by ever-fiercer floods, droughts and storms linked to rising temperatures. British Prime Minister Boris Johnson said earlier that countries have "no excuse" for failure.

Wednesday saw the release of draft text "de-



GLASGOW: An activist from the climate change group Extinction Rebellion (XR) holds a sign next to fellow protesters pretending to be dead under white sheets during a "Remember climate death" sit-in on the sidelines of the COP26 Climate Change Conference in Glasgow yesterday. —AFP

isions", which were the first real indication of where nations are 10 days into deeply technical discussions. The text, which is liable to change during ministerial debates, called for nations to "revisit and strengthen" their decarbonisation plans by next year, instead of 2025 as previously agreed.

The Paris accord contains a "ratchet" mechanism requiring countries to update emissions plans every five years. But several large emitters missed

the 2020 deadline for submitting new plans, known as nationally determined contributions. Others handed in plans that were no more ambitious—or even less so—than their initial plans.

Vulnerable nations say that the next deadline, in 2025, is too distant to deliver essential short-term emissions cuts. "Rapid, deep and sustained reductions in global greenhouse gas emissions" were needed to avert the worst impacts of heating, the text said. —AFP

Scientists appeal for immediate climate action at COP26

GLASGOW: More than 200 scientists told the COP26 summit yesterday to take immediate action to halt global warming, warning in an open letter that some climate change impacts were "irreversible" for generations. The central task of the Glasgow meeting is to implement the Paris Agreement, with its goal of limiting temperature rise to between 1.5 and 2 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels.

But as negotiations enter their final days, commitments made so far could still lead to "catastrophic" warming of as much as 2.7C by 2100, according to the UN. "We, climate scientists, stress that immediate, strong, rapid, sustained and large-scale actions are necessary," to keep warming within the Paris target, said the letter, signed by researchers across the world.

In August, a bombshell "code red" report

from the world's top climate science body, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), warned that Earth's average temperature will hit the 1.5C threshold around 2030, a decade earlier than projected only three years ago. To keep from overshooting that temperature target the IPCC says emissions must fall 45 percent this decade.

Thursday's open letter, signed by some of the IPCC's report authors, calls on delegates in Glasgow to "fully acknowledge" the scientific evidence they have compiled of the severe threats posed by climate change. "COP26 is a historic moment for the fate of climate, societies and ecosystems, because human activities have already warmed the planet by around 1.1C and future greenhouse gas emissions will determine future additional warming," the letters said. —AFP

Tributes to last French fighter on Armistice Day

PARIS: President Emmanuel Macron led tributes yesterday to the last French Resistance fighter from World War II who died last month and will be buried with a cross carved from the wood of Notre-Dame cathedral. Hubert Germain, who was the last surviving Resistance fighter honoured by late Free France leader Charles de Gaulle, died aged 101 in October.

His coffin draped in the French flag was carried up the Champs-Élysées on an armoured vehicle to the Arc de Triomphe, where Macron and visiting American Vice President Kamala Harris paid their respects.

Germain, the son of a general in France's colonial army, was in his late teens when he fled to Britain after France's capitulation where

he joined up with de Gaulle who was organising resistance to the German occupation.

He went on to fight in key battles at Bir-Hakeim in Libya, at El Alamein in Egypt and in Tunisia, as well as in the invasion of German-occupied France in 1944 which liberated the country. The Paris-born fighter was one of 1,038 people decorated with the Order of the Liberation for their heroism by de Gaulle, who would go on to become president of France and is the founder of the current constitution.

Germain, who became an MP and minister, will be buried later in a special crypt reserved for Resistance fighters at Mont Valerien, a former fortress west of Paris where German troops used to execute opponents. Macron will lay a Cross of Lorraine, the symbol of the resistance, fashioned out of wood from Notre-Dame cathedral on his coffin, in accordance with Germain's wishes.

France holds a ceremony every year at the Arc de Triomphe on Armistice Day, a public holiday to mark the armistice signed to end World War I. —AFP