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Fossil fuels make up 90% of air pollution in Mideast

15.9% of deaths in Kuwait attributable to air pollution

PARIS: More than 90 percent of harmful air pollution in the Middle East and parts of North Africa comes from fossil fuels, according to research Thursday that showed the region "permanently exceeded" dangerous air quality levels. The World Health Organization this year said the MENA region had some of the poorest air quality on Earth.

The long-standing assumption was that the smog choking most of the region's cities was primarily composed of desert sand, given their location on the world's "dust belt" where there are frequently more than 20 major sand storms each year. In 2017, an international team of researchers set off on an epic voyage across the eastern Mediterranean, through the Suez Canal and around the Gulf, using specialized equipment to analyze

air quality and particulate matter on shore.

They found that the vast majority of small particles - which can penetrate deep into the lungs, resulting in greater health risk - were manmade, mainly from the production and use of fossil fuels. Writing in the journal Communications Earth & Environment, they showed how the region is blanketed in particularly harmful compounds such as sulfur dioxide, which is a direct result of oil extraction.

Emissions from container vessels in one of the busiest shipping lanes in the world also contributed to the smog. "We have refineries such as those in Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates that are a big source of air pollution as well as ships on the Red Sea, and in the Suez Canal region," said Jos Lelieveld,

lead author from Germany's Max Planck Institute for Chemistry. "So the combination of all of these means that the air is much more polluted than what most people hope it to be."

The team used health and mortality metrics to calculate the number of excess deaths caused by air pollution in the MENA region annually. The percentage of fossil-fuel driven mortality varied between nations, with 5.9 percent of deaths in Cyprus attributable to air pollution versus 15.9 in Kuwait. This is a far higher mortality rate than in other industrialized regions. The US and Germany, for example, have 3 percent and 3.7 percent mortality due to air pollution, respectively.

Region-wide, the team calculated that air pollution

from fossil fuel use caused one in eight deaths, noting that air quality there "permanently exceeded" WHO guidelines. "It is very comparable with things that are really of great concern, for example, tobacco smoking and high cholesterol, which are major health risks in the region," Lelieveld told AFP. "And the realization of this in the region is practically zero."

He said that while governments in the region counted on fossil fuel production for the majority of their income, the time would come when the health costs due to pollution compounded growing pressure to decarbonize their economies. "They're not stupid, they know that fossil fuels will end at some point," said Lelieveld. "I'm hoping this is an additional incentive." — AFP

News in brief



Shark spotted in Kuwait waters

KUWAIT: The interior ministry warned of a 'large shark' spotted in the waters off Sabah Al-Ahmad Sea City, urging seagoers to remain extra cautious. Coordination is ongoing with relevant authorities to take necessary action, it added in a post on Twitter.

CBK raises discount rate to 3%

KUWAIT: The Central Bank of Kuwait said on Wednesday it will increase its discount rate by 25 basis points to 3 percent as of Thursday, after the US Federal Reserve's three quarters of a percentage point rate hike. The Kuwaiti dinar is pegged against a basket of currencies that includes the dollar, which gives it more flexibility to stray from Fed policy than other Gulf Arab countries, which have their currencies tied to the dollar. (See Page 8)

Iran unveils new missile

TEHRAN: Iran unveiled a new medium-range ballistic missile on Thursday during a military parade commemorating the Iran-Iraq war, state television said. "The liquid-fueled Rezvan ballistic missile has an operational range of 1,400 km," said the station, which aired images of the missile mounted on a military vehicle. The Rezvan missile was presented in Tehran during an annual parade of the armed forces to commemorate the start of the 1980-88 Iran-Iraq war. — AFP

Jolie visits Pakistan flood victims

ISLAMABAD: Hollywood star and humanitarian Angelina Jolie has said the flood disaster in Pakistan should be a "wake-up call" for the world regarding climate change, calling for more international aid after meeting with victims. "I've never seen anything like this," said Jolie, who previously visited Pakistan to meet the victims of the devastating 2010 floods and a deadly 2005 earthquake, in footage released on Thursday. "Climate change is not only real and it's not only coming, it's very much here." — AFP

313 remain in poll race; MoI busts vote-buying op

By B Izzak

KUWAIT: As many as 313 candidates will run in the Sept 29 snap National Assembly polls after 65 candidates pulled out of the race at the close of withdrawals on Thursday. The candidates include 291 males and 22 females, according to the election department of the interior ministry. The figure however could change depending on the verdicts of the

country's top courts, which will decide the fate of around 10 candidates who have been barred by an interior ministry commission because they were convicted over criminal and political offenses.

The country is divided into five electoral districts, with each electing 10 MPs for the 50-seat National Assembly. There are some 796,000 voters, of whom women voters are slightly more than their male counterparts. The constitutional court, whose rulings are final and which looks into constitutional matters, yesterday set Sunday as the date to issue its verdict on whether a highly-controversial law is in line with the constitution.

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Deaths mount in Iran protests as Internet cut

PARIS: At least 17 people have been killed as popular unrest has flared across Iran over the death in custody of Kurdish woman Mahsa Amini, while a rights group said Thursday the death toll was almost twice as high. Amini, 22, died last week after her arrest by the Islamic republic's feared morality police for allegedly wearing a hijab headscarf in an "improper" way, and news of her death sparked widespread outrage.

"Death to the dictator" and "Woman, life, freedom", protesters have been heard shouting in video footage shared widely online during the biggest wave of protests to rock the country in almost three years. The US Treasury placed the morality police on its sanctions blacklist on Thursday, holding it responsible for Amini's death and citing the "abuse and violence against Iranian women and the violation of the rights of peaceful Iranian protesters".

Some Iranian women have burnt their scarves and symbolically cut their hair in protest at the strict dress code, in defiant actions echoed in solidarity protests from New York to Istanbul.

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Erdogan arises a key mediator in Ukraine war

ISTANBUL: A mysterious reference on US television to an imminent Russia-Ukraine prisoner swap highlights Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's unique role as mediator and friend of both sides in time of war. Erdogan flew to New York from a meeting in Uzbekistan with Russian President Vladimir Putin - his third in three months - to tell US viewers on Monday that the Kremlin "is willing to end this (war) as soon as possible".

"Two hundred hostages will be exchanged upon agreement between the parties," Erdogan said in the inter-

view without giving away further details. Putin's decision to partially call up reservists and raise the threat of nuclear warfare less than two days later appeared to lay Erdogan's best intentions to waste. But an announcement late Wednesday that Russia and Ukraine were exchanging some 200 prisoners helped to validate Erdogan's efforts to walk a fine line and stay "neutral" in Europe's bloodiest conflict since World War II.

The prisoner swap adds to a growing list of diplomatic successes Erdogan is using to brandish his image as a global statesman nine months before an election that polls show he might conceivably lose. "Turkish diplomacy has been faultless since the start of the war," France's former US and UN ambassador Gerard Araud remarked.

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KUWAIT: Money, electronic equipment and copies of the Holy Quran were seized during a raid to bust a vote-buying operation.



TEHRAN: Iranian demonstrators burn a rubbish bin in the capital on Sept 21, 2022 during a protest for Mahsa Amini, days after she died in police custody. — AFP



RIYADH: Prisoners of war arrive from Russia at Riyadh airport on Sept 21, 2022. — AFP