



NEW YORK: Protestors covered in fake blood gather around the Wall Street Bull during an "Extinction Rebellion" demonstration yesterday. — AFP

Climate 'rebellion' sees mass arrests...

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Protesters chained themselves to vehicles and other structures and lay down in the middle of streets in defiance of police across Europe and parts of Asia, Africa and North America. Extinction Rebellion is demanding that governments drastically cut the carbon emissions that scientists have shown cause devastating climate change. They are backed by Thunberg, the Swedish teenager whose searing UN address in September made international headlines, and by academics studying the rising temperatures and sea levels.

Their protests have irritated drivers and some officials but raised the hopes of those who see climate change as a threat to the planet. In London, where the Extinction Rebellion movement was born last year, demonstrators put up structures on Westminster Bridge in the shadow of Britain's parliament. Police had made 217 arrests by 17:15 pm (1615 GMT). "Getting arrested sends a message to the government that otherwise law-abiding citizens are desperate," IT consultant Oshik Romem, from Israel but working in Britain for 19 years, told AFP while sitting on a road outside parliament.

Hundreds of Australians joined a sit-in on a busy inner Sydney road before being dragged away by the police. Thirty people were later charged. "We have tried petitions, lobbying and marches, and now time is running out," Australian activist Jane Morton said. Australia's conservative government has resisted adopting new environmental standards and backed lucrative coal exports. Protests occurred in 60 cities around the world, including New Delhi, Cape Town, Paris, Vienna, Madrid and Toronto.

At New York's Battery Park, some 200 demonstrators took part in a "funeral march" to Wall Street, where protesters threw fake blood over the financial district's famous bronze statue of a bull. "We need imagery like

this in order to get people's attention," 29-year-old James Comiskey told AFP, as he carried a cardboard coffin in the procession. Police arrested around a dozen people who staged a sit-in by the bull.

Campaigners in Dublin wheeled in a pink yacht and parked it outside the office of Irish Prime Minister Leo Varadkar. "We are running out of time," Dutch protester Shirleen Chin told AFP in Amsterdam. Dutch police said they arrested 90 people after Extinction Rebellion members occupied a bridge outside the famed Rijksmuseum art gallery.

The movement is partially credited with pushing the UK government in June to become the first in the Europe Union to commit itself to a net-zero target for harmful emissions by 2050. Extinction Rebellion is demanding governments reach that target by 2025, as well as holding "citizens assemblies" to decide on policies to achieve that aim. The parliament in Norway, not an EU member, in June adopted a target of 2030.

There has been less movement in other parts of Europe or the most impacted cities of Asia. And not everyone out on the streets was impressed with the campaign. "They're taking it out on everyday people trying to go about their business. They should go after big people," London taxi driver Dave Chandler told AFP.

Extinction Rebellion counters that emergencies like the one heating up the climate demands action from everyone across the world. Hundreds barricaded themselves inside a Paris shopping center for hours over the weekend. Groups unfurled banners with slogans such as "Burn capitalism, not petrol" above Paris restaurants and fashion boutiques. And hundreds brought blankets and sleeping bags to one of the main roundabouts in central Berlin which police expect to be shut down for many days.

Extinction Rebellion's tactics in Australia prompted senior conservative politicians to call for protesters' welfare payments to be cut. Sydney assistant police commissioner Mick Willing accused protesters of putting themselves and others at risk, warning that such disruptive protests in the future would "not be tolerated". — AFP

according to UN data, but some estimates are much higher. They are often barred from free education, healthcare and many jobs.

The world's biggest stateless population are the Rohingya, hundreds of thousands of whom have sought safety in Bangladesh after fleeing Myanmar which does not recognize them as citizens. Blanchett, who visited Bangladesh last year, said the Rohingya showed how a local problem could escalate over decades to become an international crisis.

The UNHCR hopes the film star's support for the #Ibelong campaign will boost low public awareness around statelessness. But the actress said she was ashamed to say that when the UNHCR first approached her she did not even know such a problem existed, let alone that millions were affected. Blanchett appealed to all nations to give stateless people "their basic human right to belong", adding that solutions were often straightforward. "It is a man-made problem and it is solvable," she added.

UNHCR chief Filippo Grandi said they had already received more than 170 pledges of action before the meeting. But he warned that "damaging forms of nationalism" and the "manipulation of anti-refugee and migrant sentiment" were putting progress at risk. No one knows how many stateless people there are because less than half of countries have data. The UNHCR has previously estimated the total at 10 million. — Reuters

Ankara says it wants to urgently establish a "safe zone" on the other side of the border where it could send back some of the 3.6 million refugees who fled the eight-year war in Syria to live on Turkish soil. But the Kurds argue that Turkey's goal is to weaken the Kurdish presence in the region by modifying the demographics of the area with the return of mostly Sunni Arab refugees. Ankara's planned offensive is expected to focus on the border areas of Ras Al-Ain and Tal Abyad, which are Arab-dominated towns governed by the Kurdish administration in northeast Syria. Kurdish forces have dug trenches and tunnels in the two areas in preparation for a Turkish offensive, according to the Observatory.

In Ras Al-Ain on Sunday, local armed forces allied with the Kurdish administration stood behind dirt berms, monitoring the frontier. They had covered streets in the town with large metal canopies to block the view of Turkish drones, sources there told AFP. "The prudent should prepare for war," said Mustafa Bozan, a 79-year-old shopkeeper. Nearby, Issam Daoud said that local security forces have erected checkpoints at key entrances to the town. "The fate of the region will be the same as that of Afrin," the 38-year-old said, referring to a former Kurdish enclave captured by Turkish troops and Syrian rebels last year.

The SDF has also warned that a Turkish offensive would reverse the military gains achieved against IS and allow for the jihadist group's surviving leaders to come out of hiding. In its statement, it said that IS cells would break out detained jihadists from Kurdish prisons and take over camps where their relatives are held. But Turkey's presidential spokesman Ibrahim Kalin said yesterday that Ankara "will also continue to fight against DAESH (IS) and will not allow it to return in any shape and form." — AFP

Gene-edited livestock carry huge promise, major pitfalls

DAVIS, California: If American researchers have successfully employed new gene-editing techniques to develop hornless dairy cattle and piglets born castrated - a seeming boon to farmers and ranchers - they are still struggling to move these animals from stable to table. A team at the University of California, Davis led by animal geneticist Alison Van Eenennaam has been working on the hornless cattle challenge.

Ranchers and farmers often have to remove animals' horns - a painful procedure - to prevent them from goring one another or harming their human handlers. But certain beef-cattle breeds like Angus are born without horns. So once scientists identified the gene responsible for the absence of horns, bioengineers with Minnesota-based Recombinetics used molecular "scissors" to alter the DNA in cells from a Holstein, a popular dairy-cattle breed.

While the genetic "scissors" called CRISPR-Cas9 are better-known, Recombinetics used a tool called TALENs (Transcription Activator-Like Effector Nuclease). The result: The 2015 birth of hornless bulls Spotigy and Buri. Buri eventually sired six calves, all of them raised on Davis's research farm. For confirmation that flesh from these animals would be suitable for human consumption, Van Eenennaam consulted with the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA).

Almost by chance, scientists there discovered an unexpected genetic modification while working on a related project using published data on the bulls' genome. "We saw the intended edited mutation, and I was just checking the final boxes before I moved on," said Alexis Norris, a bioinformatician with the FDA's Center for Veterinary Medicine. "And that's when I noticed that the plasmid sequence was present in the cows, and it was not expected. "It was really a shock."

The plasmid sequence, a DNA fragment used to alter a targeted gene, was supposed to disappear on its own, and Recombinetics - which now uses a different technique in conceiving hornless cattle - had not checked for its presence. The fact that a foreign fragment had become inserted into the DNA is not necessarily dangerous for either the animal or consumers, the

FDA says. But "if there is an unintended alteration, does that impact the composition of the food?" asked Heather Lombardi, the FDA's director of animal bio-engineering and cellular therapies. "Would it have any impact on something like allergenicity or toxicity?"

In any case, the agency says the discovery underscores the importance of maintaining close surveillance over the use of gene-editing tools on animals at a time when advocates of the technology are pressing for less rigorous oversight. For those advocates, animals whose genes have been edited by cutting and inserting DNA fragments are different from genetically modified organisms (GMOs) involving the insertion of foreign genetic elements. But the European Court of Justice decided in a closely watched 2018 case that organisms resulting from gene editing should be considered as GMOs - requiring the same lengthy approval processes.

Following the discovery of the unexpected genetic material, Van Eenennaam decided she had no choice but to order the incineration of the five gene-edited males. Keeping them alive would have been far too expensive, she said. The lone female, Princess, will likewise be euthanized and incinerated once she has given birth and provided milk to be analyzed.

"Gene editing is where GMO was 20 years ago," Van Eenennaam said. "Activists are beating the drums saying something is going to have unknown consequences, Europe comes out with the precautionary principles. The only thing different is that South America is saying no, and Africa is starting to flex its muscles," while China ramps up its gene-editing research, she said.

There are many promising applications for gene editing, Van Eenennaam said: Developing more heat-resistant livestock - invaluable in a warming world - or pigs resistant to African swine fever, which has devastated herds in China. The Australian-born Van Eenennaam, who spent time working on a Texas cattle ranch during her undergraduate days, is now experimenting with using the SRY gene, which inhibits the development of female characteristics, to create entirely male herds. — AFP

Trio wins Nobel over how cells...

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The gene rewires the body's ability to prevent the onset of cancer, and it plays a key role in how cancer cells respond to low oxygen levels.

Their work has shed new light on the specific, cell-level processes the body undergoes when low on oxygen - from helping our muscles function during exercise to adapting to life at high altitude. Cells' oxygen-sensing ability is also essential during fetal development and in creating new blood vessels. A large number of diseases are linked to EPO, including renal failure and severe anemia.

Cancerous tumors use the body's oxygen-regulating tools to hijack blood vessel formation and allow the cancer cells to spread. The Nobel committee said Monday that several trials were underway developing drugs to interrupt this process, potentially short-circuiting tumor growth. "Intense ongoing efforts in academic laboratories and pharmaceutical companies are now focused on developing drugs that can interfere with different disease states by either activating, or blocking, the oxygen-sensing machinery," the jury said.

For treatment of anemia - where the body lacks sufficient red blood cells to carry enough oxygen to tissues - medicines in development seek to stimulate EPO creation. This essentially tricks the body into thinking it is at higher altitude, prompting the creation of new red blood cells. One drug using EPO-stimulation for anemia is already on the market in China and others are in the pipeline.

Kaelin, 61, works at the Dana-Farber Cancer Institute in Boston and is a professor at Harvard Medical School in the US. Semenza, 63, is director of the Vascular Research Program at the Johns Hopkins Institute for Cell Engineering. Ratcliffe, 65, is director of clinical

research at the Francis Crick Institute in London, and director of the Target Discovery Institute in Oxford.

Ratcliffe said he was writing a grant proposal in his Oxford office when he learned of the award. "Despite this good news I guess I'll continue doing that. Meet the deadline," an excited Ratcliffe told the website Nobelprize.org. The British researcher said the prizewinning discoveries illustrated the importance of scientists being allowed to pursue "knowledge for its own sake", admitting that when he started working on EPO it seemed "niche".

"As with almost any discovery science, the impact of that becomes evident later and we didn't really foresee the broad reach of this system when we started the work," Ratcliffe said. Anna Wedell of the Nobel Committee echoed this. "The benefit is understanding this fundamental mechanism, but the practical applications are yet to come and that's actually what characterizes a great discovery," she told AFP.

Kaelin also said highlighted the importance of trying to understand "how things work," at a time when researchers are sometimes encouraged to take "short cuts" to quickly turn their research into something practical. "Scientists in general, and in particular physician scientists, are under tremendous pressure these days to try and justify their work in terms of clinical applicability," he told Nobelprize.org.

Yesterday's announcement opened an unusual 2019 Nobel season in which two literature laureates will be crowned after a scandal postponed last year's award. The Peace Prize will be awarded in Oslo on Friday, with speculation rife that Swedish teenage activist Greta Thunberg could win for her campaign to raise awareness about climate change.

Before that, the Physics Prize will be announced today and the Chemistry Prize tomorrow. On Thursday, the Swedish Academy will announce one literature laureate for 2018 and one for 2019, after postponing last year's award due to a sexual harassment scandal that exposed deep rifts among its 18 members. The announcement of the Economics Prize will wrap things up on Monday, Oct 14. — AFP

Blanchett decries 'heartbreaking'...

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basketball team were crushed because she had no papers, and how she had lived in constant fear of checkpoints.

Blanchett said she had been particularly moved by the "inhumane and heartbreaking" situation of a nine-year-old she had met in Lebanon who wanted to be a doctor. Although her mother was Lebanese, the girl had inherited her father's statelessness, making it unlikely she could stay in school. "Apart from the moral responsibility we have to solve this problem, it's such a waste of human capital. I found it a tragedy," Blanchett said. Lebanon is among 25 countries with discriminatory laws that prevent or limit women passing their nationality to their children - a major cause of statelessness. The actress praised Sierra Leone and Madagascar for scrapping similar laws.

In Kuwait, stateless people are known as bedoons, which is short for "bedoon jinsiya" meaning "without nationality" in Arabic. Some trace their origins to nomadic tribes that once moved freely around the Gulf region. There are about 92,000 bedoons in Kuwait,

US starts Syria border pullback...

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Later yesterday, Trump said he will "obliterate" Turkey's economy if Ankara does anything that in his "great and unmatched wisdom" he considers to be "off limits" in Syria. Trump's latest tweets appeared to signal a climbdown, following a storm of criticism from his own Republican party that he was betraying the Kurdish guerrillas. "If Turkey does anything that I, in my great and unmatched wisdom, consider to be off limits, I will totally destroy and obliterate the Economy of Turkey (I've done before!)," he wrote.

Also, US Defense Secretary Mark Esper and Joint Chiefs Chairman Mark Milley told their counterparts in Ankara that "unilateral action creates risks for Turkey," Pentagon spokesman Jonathan Hoffman said in a statement. "The Department of Defense made clear to Turkey - as did the president - that we do not endorse a Turkish operation in Northern Syria," he added.

SDF spokesman Mustafa Bali said Washington's decision "is about to ruin the trust and cooperation between the SDF and US". "People here are owed an explanation," he said on Twitter. The SDF, which spearheaded - with backing from the US-led coalition - several of the most significant battles against IS over the past five years, also vowed to resist any Turkish attack. "As the Syrian Democratic Forces, we are determined to defend our land at all costs," it said in a statement posted on social media.

Judge orders Trump to hand...

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Trump quickly filed an emergency appeal to the 2nd US Circuit Court of Appeals in Manhattan, which temporarily blocked Manhattan District Attorney Cyrus Vance from enforcing the subpoena, citing the "unique issues" in the case. Marrero's decision would have forced Trump's longtime accounting firm Mazars USA to start turning over documents on Monday afternoon. The decision further complicates Trump's battle to keep his finances under wraps, despite having promised during his 2016 White House run that he would disclose his tax returns.

Vance, a Democrat, had subpoenaed personal and corporate tax returns from 2011 to 2018 and other records from Mazars, as part of a criminal probe into the president and his family business. "The Radical Left Democrats have failed on all fronts, so now they are pushing local New York City and State Democrat prosecutors to go get President Trump," Trump, a Republican, tweeted after Marrero's decision. "A thing like this has never happened to any President before. Not even close!"

In suing Vance last month to block the subpoena, Trump argued that he was immune from criminal probes while in office, and the US constitution required Vance to wait until after he left the White House. Trump is separately trying to block Deutsche Bank AG from handing over financial records, which the bank has said include tax returns, sought by multiple US House of Representatives committees. That probe is separate from the debate over whether Trump should be impeached because of his dealings with Ukraine. The 2nd Circuit appeals court heard oral arguments in the

Deutsche Bank case on Aug 23. It has yet to rule.

Jay Sekulow, a lawyer for Trump, said he was pleased the subpoena would not be enforced immediately. Danny Frost, a spokesman for Vance, declined to comment. Both sides proposed schedules to allow oral arguments in Trump's appeal later this month. Mazars did not respond to requests for comment, but has said it would comply with its legal obligations. The US Department of Justice, which opposed Vance's bid to dismiss Trump's case, declined to comment.

Marrero, who was appointed by Democratic President Bill Clinton, declined to assert jurisdiction over the Vance subpoena, saying Trump should have brought his case in a New York state court. The judge, however, made clear that if the appeals court disagreed with that finding, Trump should lose. Marrero said Trump failed to show that enforcing the subpoena would interfere with his presidential duties, cause irreparable harm or be against the public interest.

He also rejected as too broad the idea that the president, his family and his businesses should be shielded from criminal process. "The expansive notion of constitutional immunity invoked here to shield the President from judicial process would constitute an overreach of executive power," Marrero wrote. Marrero said even President Richard Nixon had conceded during the Watergate scandal that he would be required to produce documents in response to a judicial subpoena.

In seeking a stay, Trump's lawyers said the case raised "momentous" questions about the president's immunity and that complying with the subpoena would cause irreversible damage. "There will be no way to unscramble the egg scrambled by the disclosure," Trump's lawyers said. Vance issued the subpoena four weeks after issuing another subpoena to the Trump Organization for records of hush money payments, including to two women prior to the 2016 election who said they had sexual relationships with Trump, which he denies. Trump is running for re-election. His current term ends on Jan 20, 2021. — Reuters