

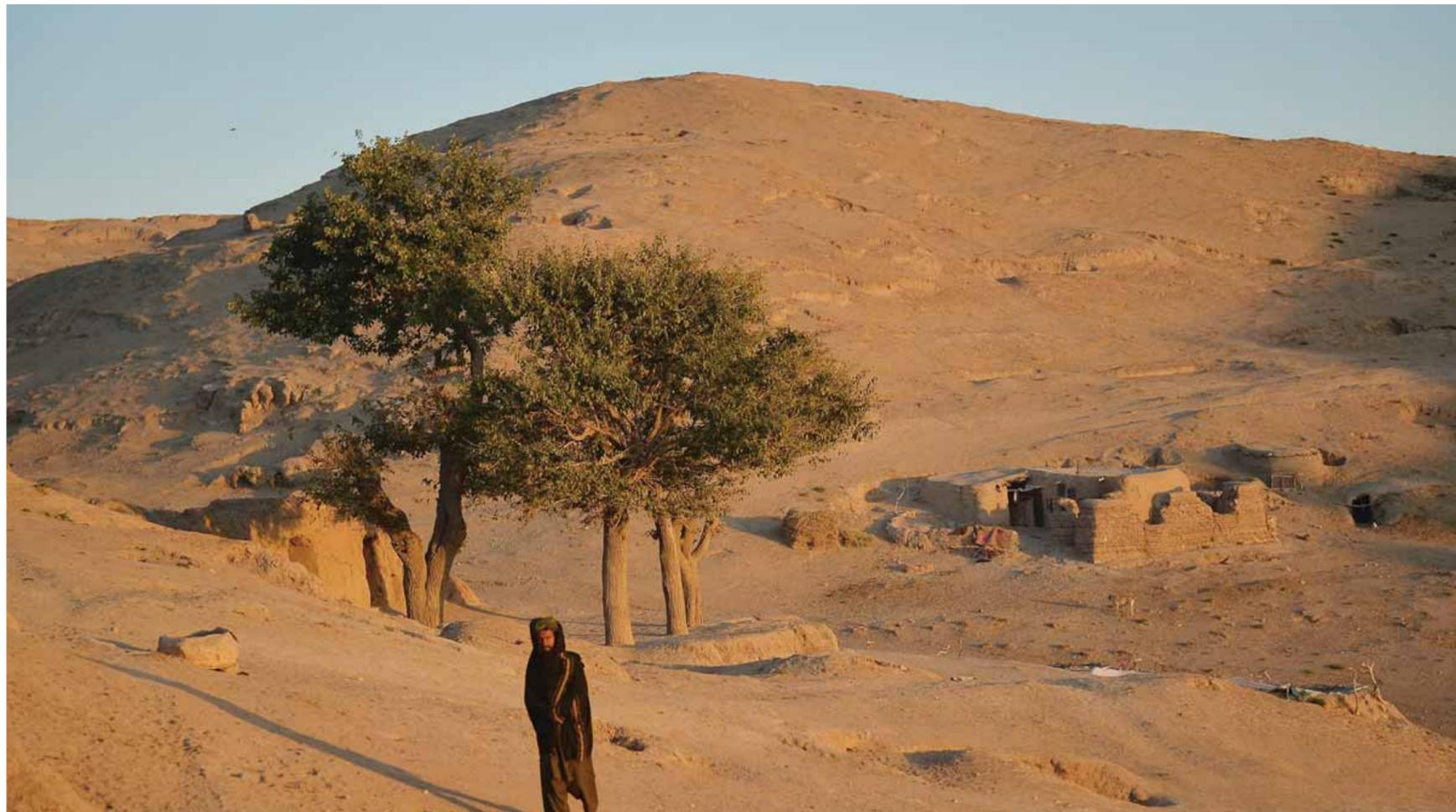


Hunger forces Afghans to sell young daughters into marriage

## UAE urged to probe detention, deportation of African workers

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BALA MURGHAB: Photo shows a man walking as the sun sets at the Jamal Khan village of Bala Murghab district in Badghis province. Drought stalks the parched fields around the remote Afghan district of Bala Murghab, where climate change is proving a deadlier foe than the country's recent conflicts. — AFP

# Asia suffers hottest year on record

## Extreme weather taking a heavy toll on development

GENEVA: Asia suffered its hottest year on record in 2020, the United Nations said yesterday ahead of the COP26 summit, with extreme weather taking a heavy toll on the continent's development. In its annual "State of the Climate in Asia" report, the UN's World Meteorological Organization said every part of the region had been affected.

"Extreme weather and climate change impacts across Asia in 2020 caused the loss of life of thousands of people, displaced millions of others and cost hundreds of billions of dollars, while wreaking a heavy toll on infrastructure and ecosystems," the WMO said. "Sustainable development is threatened, with food and water insecurity, health risks and environmental degradation on the rise."

The report comes days before COP26, the UN Climate Change Conference being held in Glasgow from Sunday to November 12. The report also laid bare the total annual average losses due to climate-related hazards. China suffered an estimated \$238 billion, followed by India at \$87 billion, Japan with \$83 billion and South Korea on \$24 billion. But when

the size of the economy is considered, the average annual losses are expected to be as high as 7.9 percent of gross domestic product for Tajikistan, 5.9 percent for Cambodia and 5.8 percent for Laos.

### Prolonged displacement

Increased heat and humidity are forecast to lead to an effective loss of outdoor working hours across the continent, with a potential cost of many billions of dollars. "Weather and climate hazards, especially floods, storms, and droughts, had significant impacts in many countries of the region," said WMO chief Petteri Taalas. "Combined, these impacts take a significant toll on long-term sustainable development." Many weather and climate-related displacements in Asia are prolonged, with people unable to



Extreme weather kills thousands, displaces millions

return home or integrate locally, the report said. In 2020 floods and storms affected approximately 50 million people in Asia, resulting in more than 5,000 fatalities.

This is below the annual average of the last two decades (158 million people affected and about 15,500 fatalities) "and is testimony to the success of early warning systems in many countries in Asia", with around seven in 10 people covered. Asia's warmest year on record saw the mean temperature 1.39 degrees Celsius above the 1981-2010 average. The 38.0 C registered at Verkhoyansk in Russia is provisionally the highest known temperature anywhere north of the Arctic Circle.

In 2020, average sea surface temperatures reached record high values in the Indian, Pacific and

Arctic Oceans. Sea surface temperatures and ocean warming in and around Asia are increasing more than the global average. They have been warming at more than triple the average in the Arabian sea, and parts of the Arctic Ocean. Arctic sea ice minimum extent (after the summer melt) in 2020 was the second lowest on the satellite record since 1979. There are approximately 100,000 square kilometers of glaciers on the Tibetan Plateau and in the Himalayas—the largest volumes of ice outside the polar regions and the source of 10 major Asian rivers.

"Glacier retreat is accelerating and it is projected that glacier mass will decrease by 20 percent to 40 percent by 2050, affecting the lives and livelihoods of about 750 million people in the region," the report said. "This has major ramifications for global sea level, regional water cycles and local hazards such as landslides and avalanches." A quarter of Asia's mangroves are in Bangladesh. However, the tropical storm-exposed country's mangroves decreased by 19 percent from 1992 to 2019, the report said. — AFP

## 'Nowhere is safe': Philippine typhoon victims live in fear

GUINOBATAN: A year after a powerful storm sent an avalanche of volcanic rock and sand crashing down, burying her house, Philippine food vendor Florivic Baldoza still lives in an evacuation centre. As global warming brings increasingly extreme weather, she now fears "nowhere is safe". Hundreds of families from poor villages around Mayon volcano in Albay province on the country's most populous island of Luzon are waiting for new homes after Typhoon Goni pounded the region last November.



GUINOBATAN: Photo shows a resident sitting amongst big boulders washed away from the slopes of nearby Mayon volcano during heavy rains in San Francisco village in Guinobatan, Albay province, south of Manila. — AFP

"That's the strongest I've ever experienced," Baldoza, 40, told AFP, standing on a mound of dark sand that now covers the house she once shared with her husband and two teenage daughters. Several hundred thousand people fled as Goni barreled towards the archipelago nation-ranked as one of the world's most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change.

But some residents in San Francisco village—including Baldoza's family—ignored warnings to shelter in a school, confident a river dike built several years ago would protect them from flooding. As the most powerful typhoon to hit the country last year dumped heavy rain on an area still sodden from another cyclone a week earlier, Baldoza realized her family was in peril when water began cascading over the several meters high cement wall.

They bolted to her mother's house across the road as a devastating mix of water, volcanic sand and boulders smashed the dike

further upstream and tore through the village. "We were trapped inside the house," Baldoza told AFP. "We were crying, my husband was separated from us—we thought he was dead." Lucky to be alive, but trapped in deep mud, Baldoza and eight relatives, including children, twisted their bodies from side to side to escape, then climbed out a window and up on to the roof.

Her husband, Alexander, survived by scrambling up a mango tree. Holding on to a powerline to avoid being blown away by fierce winds, the family clambered over the top of several houses before reaching a taller building. "Our house was being hit by boulders, but we couldn't do anything," said Baldoza, who watched helplessly as the torrent swept away the family's motorized tricycle and motorbike. "If we hadn't left our house, we would have died."

It is not the first time excessive rain has forced Baldoza to relocate. About 23 years ago, before Baldoza got married, her mother sold their house in a flood-prone area of the

same village and moved the family to higher ground. "We didn't expect that we would experience the same thing," Baldoza said. "I don't think there's a safe place anymore. Wherever we go, we get flooded." Baldoza visits the site of her house most days as she sells home-cooked meals and soft drinks to workers repairing the damaged dike. "I feel like crying because I raised my children here, this is where they were baptized, my husband and I were married here," she said.

Baldoza's family now lives in a classroom in the nearby Marcial O. Ranola Memorial School, which has been converted into an emergency evacuation centre. Face-to-face classes have been banned in the Philippines since the start of the coronavirus pandemic. Families in Albay province, dubbed the nation's "disaster capital", are used to spending a few days every rainy season in shelters. About a quarter of the roughly 20 storms and typhoons to hit the Philippines every year affect the impoverished region, wiping out crops, homes and infrastructure. — AFP

## Police arrest 150 suspects globally in dark web sting

THE HAGUE: Police around the world arrested 150 suspects, including several high-profile targets, involved in buying or selling illegal goods online in one of the largest-ever stings targeting the dark web, Europol said yesterday. Operation Dark HunTOR also recovered millions of euros in cash and bitcoin, as well as drugs and guns. The bust stems from a German-led police sting earlier this year taking down the "world's largest" darknet marketplace.

Dark HunTOR, "was composed of a series of separate but complementary actions in Australia, Bulgaria, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, and the United States," the Hague-based Europol said. In the United States alone, police arrested 65 people, while 47 were held in Germany, 24 in Britain, and four each in Italy and the Netherlands, among others. A number of those arrested "were considered high-value targets" by Europol. Law agents also confiscated 26.7 million euros (\$31 million) in cash and virtual currencies, as well as 45 guns and 234 kilograms of drugs, including 25,000 ecstasy pills.

Italian police also shut down the "DeepSea" and "Berlusconi" marketplaces, "which together boasted over 100,000 announcements of illegal products", said Europol, which coordinated the operation together with its twin judicial agency Eurojust. German

police in January closed down the "DarkMarket" online marketplace, used by its alleged operator, an Australian, to facilitate the sale of drugs, stolen credit card data and malware.

Europol said the arrest of the alleged operator, caught near the German-Danish border at the time, and the seizure of the criminal infrastructure provided "investigators across the world with a trove of evidence". German prosecutors at the time said DarkMarket came to light in the course of a major investigation against the web-hosting service Cyberbunker, located in a former NATO bunker in southwest Germany. Europol's European Cybercrime Centre EC3 has since been compiling intelligence packages to identify the key targets, the continent's policing agency said.

The secret "darknet" includes websites that can be assessed only with specific software or authorizations, ensuring anonymity for users. They have faced increased pressure from international law enforcement in recent months. "The point of operations such as this is to put criminals operating on the dark web on notice (that) the law enforcement community has the means and global partnerships to unmask them and hold them accountable for their illegal activities," Europol deputy director of operations Jean-Philippe Lecouffe said. — AFP