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2023 set to be hottest year on record

Biggest climate talks ever face global chaos

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AND JENNIFER A DLOUHY
BLOOMBERG

More than 70,000 politicians, diplomats, campaigners, financiers and business leaders will fly to Dubai to talk about arresting the world's slide toward environmental catastrophe.

The need for progress has never been more urgent: 2023 will almost certainly be the hottest year on record, greenhouse gas emissions are still rising, and promises to cut pollution remain insufficient to take the risk of unmanageable warming off the table. At the same time, rapid inflation and global instability — including wars in Ukraine and the Gaza Strip — have scrambled the politics and economics of the energy transition.

“This is a very sobering, even somber moment as world leaders gather,” said Rachel Cleetus, policy director with the climate program at the Union of Concerned Scientists in Massachusetts. “That said, there’s a real opportunity in the climate space to secure some wins.”

The responsibility for making a breakthrough lies with COP28 President Sultan Al Jaber. To many in the climate community his leadership of the talks is tarnished by his role as chief executive officer of Abu Dhabi National Oil Co., one of the world's largest oil producers. A report this week alleged he was prepared to use his COP role to promote Adnoc's interests.

For his part, Al Jaber has publicly said he saw this COP as an opportunity to co-opt the fossil fuel industry into tackling emissions. One of the star announcements is expected to be a pledge by the global oil and gas sector to eliminate emissions of methane, a potent greenhouse gas, by 2030. While the deal won't have legal force, it's one of several signs that progress can be made in the United Arab Emirates this December.

At least 150 countries and 25 national and international oil companies have signed the pledge, Adnan Amin, chief executive of COP28, said in an interview. His aim is to get 50% of methane emissions covered by the commitment.

“These are very, very significant companies



A person walks past a COP28 sign in Abu Dhabi on Oct. 1. Under the Paris Agreement signed in 2015, countries need to hold an official stocktake this year to evaluate the progress in meeting their target to hold warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius from pre-industrial levels. REUTERS

and countries and if we are able to really attack the methane issue here, that gives us substantial emission reductions of probably the most dangerous greenhouse gas,” Amin said, talking up prospects for this year's summit.

Perhaps the most positive development so far has been the improved diplomatic mood between the U.S. and China. The world's top two polluters agreed earlier this month to publish more expansive emissions-cutting pledges and back a target to triple renewable energy. That goal now appears likely to make it into the final COP document.

It's a renewal of climate collaboration



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Report notes Jehovah's Witnesses sex abuse

KARIN KANEKO
STAFF WRITER

A group of children of Jehovah's Witnesses submitted a report detailing sexual abuse within the religious organization to the Child and Family Agency on Tuesday and demanded that action be taken.

Based on a survey conducted on social media by the JW Child Abuse Damage Archive, the report said that the most common perpetrators of sexual abuse were “rank-and-file witnesses” and “elders,” with 35 respondents, who were minors when they were subject to abuse, saying that they believed they had been sexually abused by those in the organization.

“During a fellowship (the practice of socializing over a meal or tea) in our home, a witness came into my room, leaving us alone, pushed me onto the bed and almost had sexual intercourse with me,” one respondent said.

Such incidents mostly occurred at the victims' homes and assembly halls, or Kingdom Halls, which are a place of worship for Jehovah's Witnesses. More than 90% of the abuse was carried out by members of the same congregation that met regularly.

In addition, 42 respondents, including 15 minors, were also forced to tell elders in a judicial committee — which investigates a witnesses' alleged sin — about their sexual experiences and felt that talking about such things was a form of sexual abuse, with more than 60% saying that they were still struggling to cope with the experience.

Among other findings, 139 respondents said that they were exposed to inappropriate sexual expressions such as “anal sex,” “bestiality” and “oral sex,” among many others. Some 137 respondents said that they were minors when they were first exposed to such terms, with 35% of the respondents saying they were under the age of 6 and more than 80% saying they were under the age of 12.

According to the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare, “showing or orally conveying materials containing sexually explicit content that is inappropriate for the individual's age under the guise of education” and “forcing someone to talk

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With eye on China, Japan and Vietnam take ties to ‘new heights’

Analysis
GABRIEL DOMINGUEZ
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Japan is continuing to strengthen ties with Southeast Asian countries, upgrading relations with Vietnam on Monday in a move that will pave the way for greater cooperation in areas such as trade and security as Tokyo seeks to counterbalance China's growing footprint in the region.

At a summit in Tokyo marking 50 years of diplomatic ties, Prime Minister Fumio Kishida

and Vietnamese President Vo Van Thuong agreed to elevate the relationship to a “comprehensive strategic partnership.” The move makes Japan one of Vietnam's top-tier partners, along with the United States, China, Russia, South Korea and India.

In a joint statement, the two sides vowed to ramp up cooperation to “new heights” and further expand it to “new fronts,” including in the fields of economic security, energy, digital transformation, people-to-people exchanges and regional security, with Kishida calling Hanoi “a key partner in achieving a free and open Indo-Pacific.”

Thuong, who is due to depart Thursday after his first visit to Japan since taking office in March, said the upgraded ties opened a “new chapter” in bilateral relations as the two countries become “even more closely aligned” and contribute to regional peace and stability.

The move comes less than three months after Washington also elevated relations with Hanoi, with the former foes strengthening trade and investment ties, including on semi-conductors and critical minerals.

Tokyo and Hanoi have long had strong economic ties. Japan is Vietnam's third-largest source of foreign investment and its fourth-

largest trading partner, with bilateral trade reaching almost \$50 billion last year. It is also Vietnam's largest donor of official development assistance (ODA), helping the country become a regional manufacturing hub and one of Asia's fastest-growing economies.

There are also strong people-to-people exchanges. Vietnamese make up the second-largest foreign community in Japan, with 520,000 residents — second only to Chinese — and play a key role in Japan's technical intern program. As of the end of 2022, there were about 325,000 foreign technical interns in Japan, more than half of whom came from Vietnam.

Hanh Nguyen, a research fellow at the Yoko-suka Council on Asia Pacific Studies, said that the relationship upgrade was part of Hanoi's strategy to diversify its partner nations in response to the rapidly changing security environment.

“Vietnam's decision to upgrade partnerships with the U.S. and South Korea, as well as recent rumors of a potential upgrade with Australia and Singapore made this partnership upgrade with Japan a no-brainer, especially given the extent of bilateral cooperation,” Nguyen said.

At the same time, Vietnam sees Japan, just

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Verdy aiming for promotion
Team needs only a draw on Saturday to enable return to J1 | **SPORTS, PAGE 10**

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In Israel's north, troops brace for long standoff

CHLOE ROUYEYROLLES-BAZIRE
MENARA, ISRAEL
AFP-JIJI

Already weeks into their deployment, Israeli soldiers in the country's north are settling in for a long, tense standoff with Hezbollah across the border in Lebanon.

Until a truce with Hamas went into effect in the Gaza Strip to the south on Friday, the Israel-Lebanon border saw near-daily exchanges of fire with the Iranian-backed militant organization.

But the troops stationed there are in “high spirits,” according to Yoshiahu, a 27-year-old captain who was only permitted by the army to give his first name.

“It was clear that we would be getting into something pretty intense, and the intensity has been going up,” Yoshiahu said during a military-arranged tour of the army position.

The reservist left his young son and engineering studies when he was called up to the front-line after Hamas's unprecedented Oct. 7 attack on Israel. The cross-border raid killed over 1,200 people, most of them civilians, according to Israeli authorities.



Israel has responded with a military campaign it says aims to destroy Hamas, killing nearly 15,000 people in the Gaza Strip — mostly civilians — according to authorities in the Hamas-run territory.

Yoshiahu said the troops on the border believe they “can't go home, because someone has to protect the people here.”

“What we are doing here is very important, and we will be here as long as we need, there is no question about it.”

A soldier stands near a car destroyed in a strike by the Hezbollah movement in Menara in northern Israel, near the Lebanon border on Monday. AFP-JIJI

Over nearly two months, Yoshiahu has traveled much of the so-called Blue Line, the roughly 80-kilometer U.N.-drawn demarcation between Lebanon and Israel.

The last war between Israel and Hezbollah, in 2006, saw intense rocket barrages, but exchanges of fire in the years since had been sporadic until after Oct. 7.

Israeli concerns are focused on incursions by armed militants and drones, which the military says has already happened.

Almost all civilians living along the northern border have been evacuated by the army, and the Galilee kibbutz community of Menara — one of the closest to the demarcation line — now resembles a ghost town.

Avocados rot at the feet of trees, and children's bikes lie abandoned on doorsteps. One house collapsed in on itself after being hit by an anti-tank missile.

“Firing an anti-tank missile at a house where civilians live, that shows you exactly Hezbollah's DNA,” said army spokesman Olivier Rafowicz.

Hezbollah says it only fires at military targets.

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COOL JAPAN Photo Contest for Foreigners 2023

Theme:
‘The unique appeal of Japan’
Submission deadline:
Dec. 15

Current or past international residents may participate.
Secretariat of Intellectual Property Strategy
Headquarters
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