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## Russia in historic foreign debt default

Russia has defaulted on its debt for the first time in more than a century after missing a Sunday deadline. Russia has the money to make a \$100m payment and is willing to pay, but sanctions made it impossible to get the sum to international creditors.

The Kremlin had been determined to avoid the default, which is a major blow to the nation's prestige. The \$100m interest payment was due on 27 May. Russia says the money was sent to “Euroclear”, a bank which would then distribute the payment to investors.

But that payment has been stuck there, according to “Bloomberg News”, and creditors have not received it.

Meanwhile, some Taiwanese holders of Russian bonds denominated in euros have not received interest payments, according to the “Reuters” news agency, which cited two sources. The money had not arrived within 30 days of the due date, that is, Sunday evening, and so is considered a default.

Euroclear would not say if the payment had been blocked, but said it adhered to all sanctions, introduced following Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Although default is a symbolic blow, it will have few immediate practical consequences for Russia.

Defaulting nations usually find it impossible to borrow any more money, but Russia is already in effect blocked from borrowing in Western markets by sanctions.

The default will start repayments on a large part of Russia's debt, according to Chris Weafer, former chief strategist at Russia largest bank “Sberbank”.

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## Climate change: New Zealand's plan to tax cows and sheep burps

New Zealand has revealed a plan to tax sheep and cows burps in an effort to face one of the country's biggest sources of greenhouse gases. It would make it the first nation to tax farmers for the methane emissions from the animals they keep.

New Zealand is home to just over five million people, along with around 10 million cows and 26 million sheep. Almost half the country's total greenhouse gas emissions come from agriculture, mainly methane.

However, agricultural emissions have previously not been included in New Zealand's plan to reduce greenhouse gases emission, which has been criticised by those calling for the government to do more to stop global warming.

"There is no question that we need to cut the amount of methane we are putting into the atmosphere. An emissions-pricing system for agriculture will play a key part in how we achieve that," New Zealand's climate change minister James Shaw said.

Under the proposal, farmers will have to pay for their gas emissions from 2025. The plan also includes incentives for farmers who reduce emissions through feed additives, while planting trees on farms could be used to offset emissions.

The money raised from the scheme will be invested in research, development and services for farmers, the country's environment ministry said.

Methane is the second most common greenhouse gas after carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>). It is one of the most potent, and responsible for a third of global warming from human activities.

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## Queen Elizabeth II becomes second longest-serving monarch

The Queen has become the second longest serving monarch in history.

On Monday, she has been on the throne for 70 years and 127 days, second only to Louis XIV of France who became king at the age of four. She overtakes Thailand's King, Bhumibol Adulyadej, who died in 2016, having equalled his reign on Sunday.

Last weekend, the 96-year-old Queen's Platinum Jubilee was marked with four days of celebrations across the UK.

She had officially reached 70 years of reign on 6 February, but the weekend was chosen for the Jubilee events. Many of the events involved outdoor elements, more suited to summer months.

If the Queen is still reigning in May 2024 she would take the title of the longest reigning monarch. Louis XIV's reign of 72 years and 110 days was from 1643 to 1715. But he only started to rule personally in his 20s, in 1661. The Queen became monarch at the age of 25, following the death of her father in the early hours of 6 February 1952. She said at the time it was not a title "to which I have ever aspired".

The Queen, who has mobility problems, has been taking on fewer official duties recently, with her family members - the Prince Charles and Camilla - taking a more prominent role.

She delighted many by appearing on the Buckingham Palace balcony during the Jubilee, but it is not known when she will appear in public next. One occasion could be the "Royal Ascot", a favourite event of the horse-loving Queen. Anyway, she missed last year's meet.

At the close of the Jubilee weekend, she said in a letter of thanks to the British public that she was "deeply touched" by the number of people to have celebrated alongside her.



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## **Sahel should be seen as region of “opportunity” despite “multiple crises”**

The Sahel is a vast under-populated region extending across Africa, from Senegal in the west to Djibouti in the east, an area which is being destabilized by terrorism-related conflict, the effects of climate change and a lack of development.

The people who live in the Sahel are far from the centres of decision-making of the country and so they live on the margins. But they are resilient and self-sufficient, living from commerce and nomadic farming.

Following political problems in Libya and before that, in Afghanistan, this region has become a sanctuary for terrorist groups who use religion to incite hatred. This is not Islam, it's a corrupted form of Islam that these groups want to spread to serve their plans, taking advantage of the fact that most of the people in the Sahel are very sensitive to religious issues.

Because of lack of basic services and infrastructure, some people can be tempted by these terrorist groups, who, in some situations play the role of the State by offering services like education, health and justice.

Investing more in education is vital to articulate durable solutions. In a region which is 60 to 70 per cent made up of young people, it's crucial to double our efforts to ensure that young people have access to education.

It's also important that the State, and public institutions, play their role by ensuring the delivery of basic services and putting in place development infrastructures. There is no way out without development. And that requires a minimum of financial support.

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## Biden confident consensus will be reached on Nordic Nato applications

President Biden is confident consensus can be reached over Sweden and Finland's membership of Nato, after Turkey's President Erdogan said he would not approve their applications.

The leaders of Finland and Sweden will visit the US President in Washington on Thursday to discuss their admission to the alliance, according to the White House. For Finland and Sweden to join Nato, all 30 existing members must agree.

On Tuesday, a significant majority of Finland's members of parliament voted in favour of the country's proposal to apply for membership. Of the 200 eligible to vote, 188 threw their support behind the motion.

The alliance's secretary general Jens Stoltenberg says it is "a historic moment", adding that the Nordic countries' membership would increase shared security. The two nations' leaders announced their intention to apply for membership of the defence alliance on Sunday, because of Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Finland shares a long land and sea border with Russia. Both Finland and neighbouring Sweden remained neutral throughout the Cold War so their applications to join Nato mark a significant change. The process could be fast, taking only a few weeks, but would require the support of all 30 members, ratification of which could take up to a year.

Finnish President Sauli Niinisto and Sweden's Prime Minister Magdalena Andersson are due to meet US President Joe Biden at the White House tomorrow to discuss European security and support for Ukraine.

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## Germany to intensify military collaboration with Finland and Sweden

Germany will increase its military co-operation with Finland and Sweden, Chancellor Olaf Scholz says, adding that his country will push for a "very quick" ratification of their accession to Nato.

"We will intensify our military co-operation especially in the Baltic Sea region" he says. "It is already clear that our countries are bound together by an obligation to provide each other with all possible assistance and support for mutual protection" as members of the United Nations and the European Union, Scholz added. "Both countries can always rely on our support, especially in this very special situation," he said.

Speaking at a news conference with the prime minister of Liechtenstein, the German chancellor says he is confident that Turkey will support Finland and Sweden joining the alliance despite its initial objections.

With Moscow starting its assault in eastern border regions of Ukraine nearly three months ago, Helsinki and Stockholm are going to give up of military non-alignment over fears they could be next.

Earlier, Scholz spoke to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky and they agreed that a diplomatic agreement between Ukraine and Russia would require an immediate end to hostilities on the part of Russia and a withdrawal of Russian troops from Ukraine.

Russian President Vladimir Putin said the move poses "no direct threat for us... but the expansion of Nato military infrastructure to these territories (Finland and Sweden) will certainly provoke our response".

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## Buzz Lightyear film banned from cinemas by United Arab Emirates

Disney and Pixar's latest animated movie "Lightyear" has been banned from cinemas in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). The film contains a same-sex kiss, but the UAE's Media Regulatory Office did not give a specific reason for its decision.

The department just said the film was banned for its "violation of the country's media content standards". The movie centres on the character Buzz Lightyear from the Toy Story series.

The BBC has contacted both the UAE government and Disney for comment. The Lightyear ban comes just six months after the UAE said it would stop censoring new films and announced a "21-plus age" rating for films it classifies for older audiences.

The United Arab Emirates, a Sunni Muslim-ruled country, criminalises same-sex sexual activity between adults.

Last year, Pixar's film "Onward" has been banned by several Middle Eastern countries because of a reference to lesbian parents.

In April, Saudi Arabia requested cuts to "LGBT references" in Disney's "Doctor Strange in the Multiverse of Madness", which was ultimately not screened in the country.

Other films featuring gay storylines to have fallen under censorship around the world, including Elton John's "Rocketman": it was banned in Samoa and sex scenes from the movie were cut by a Russian distributor.

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## China's plans to go to the Moon, Mars and beyond

Three Chinese astronauts have begun a six-month mission, to work on the country's new space station. It is China's latest step towards making itself a leading space power for the decades ahead.

Last year, China put into orbit the first module of its Tiangong or "Heavenly Palace" space station. It plans to add more modules - such as a science lab - by the end of the year. Next year, it will launch a space telescope, called Xuntian. This will fly close to the space station, and dock with it for servicing and refuelling. Tiangong will have its own power generator, propulsion, life support systems.

China is the third country in history to have put both astronauts into space and to build a space station, after the Soviet Union (now Russia) and the US. China has big ambitions for Tiangong, and hopes it will replace the International Space Station (ISS), which will be dismissed in 2031.

Chinese astronauts are excluded from the ISS because US law bans its space agency, Nasa, from sharing its data with China.

China's ambitions do not end there: by 2030, it aims to have put its first astronauts on the Moon, and to have sent probes to collect samples from Mars and Jupiter.

As China expands its role in space, several other countries are also aiming to get to the Moon.

Nasa plans to return to the Moon with astronauts from the US and other countries from 2025 onwards. Japan, South Korea, Russia, India are also working on their own lunar missions. India has launched its second major Moon mission already and wants to have its own space station by 2030. Meanwhile, the European Space Agency, which is working with Nasa on Moon missions, is also planning a network of lunar satellites to make it easier for astronauts to communicate with Earth.

Chinese state media "Xinhua" said at least 300,000 people have worked on China's space projects - almost 18 times as many as currently work for Nasa. The Chinese National Space Administration was created in 2003 with an initial annual budget of two billion yuan (\$300m). However, in 2016 China opened its space industry to private companies, and these are now investing more than 10 billion yuan (\$1.5bn) a year, according to Chinese media.



**ANSA<sup>en</sup> Latest News****Climate Crisis: Italy's seas are feeling the heat, says Greenpeace**

Italy's seas are feeling the effects of the climate crisis in a big way, with rising water temperatures causing drastic changes to marine biodiversity, according to a new report by Greenpeace.

The second edition of the “Mare Caldo” (Hot Sea) report, prepared with the University of Genoa's Environment and Life Sciences Department, said species that are sensitive to the special nature of Italy's seas are disappearing while species that are better suited to warmer waters, often alien ones, are proliferating.

Over 530,000 temperatures were taken at different depths and in different parts of Italy's protected marine areas as part of the Mare Caldo project. Among other things, this research detected an abnormal sea water “heat wave” in June 2020 off the island of Elba and in the protected marine area of Portofino, with temperatures climbing by 1.5 degrees centigrade from their monthly average and staying at that level for a period of three weeks.

Coralline algae and sponges are among the Mediterranean species showing evident signs of necrosis due to the increases in temperature, the report said.

On the other hand, the presence of “bearded worm” (a particular type of worm) has increased considerably in Italy's southern protected marine areas, while some alien species are invading, such as the *Lamprohaminoea ovalis*, a gastropod mollusc of Polynesian origin that has been observed off Elba for the first time.

“The Mare Caldo project is showing how our seas are also suffering from the impact of climate change,” said Alessandro Giannì, Greenpeace Italia's campaigns director.

“To address this crisis, it is now more necessary than ever to free ourselves from fossil fuels and to protect the more sensitive marine ecosystems”.

“It has been seen that, where we protect biodiversity from the impact of destructive human activity, organisms are capable of recovering and adapting to a change which, unfortunately, is already taking place”

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## Queen Elizabeth makes surprise visit to Paddington Station

The Queen has made a surprise visit to Paddington Station to see the completed new underground line, called “Elizabeth line”. Transport for London (TfL) has announced the new line will open to the public on 24 May.

Ahead of the opening, the 96-year-old Queen joined her youngest son, Prince Edward, for the official visit. Dressed in sunshine yellow, she arrived at 11:30, holding a walking stick. The Queen and Prince Edward were welcomed by Prime Minister Boris Johnson and Mayor of London Sadiq Khan. They met the staff who worked to the project, and those who will run the railway, including train drivers and station staff.

Even though it's not common that you have a rail line named after you, there hadn't really been much expectation the Queen would attend “Elizabeth line” official opening. It had only been a “possibility”. But, Oyster card in hand, the Queen was there, looking well, despite worries about her health.

Crossrail was due to be completed in December 2018 and was set a budget of £14.8bn in 2010. The total cost has been estimated at £18.9bn.

Transport for London (TfL) says the “Elizabeth line will cut journey times for travel across the capital. The line goes from Reading (in Berkshire) and Heathrow Airport, into west London, to Shenfield (in Essex). Once the route will be opened, services in the central London section will run every five minutes between 06:30 and 23:00.

The new line is expected to reduce journey times from Abbey Wood to Paddington by almost half, to 29 minutes. Travel times between Liverpool Street and Woolwich are also expected to be halved to 15 minutes.

London Mayor Mr Khan said the line was the “most significant addition to our transport network in decades”.

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## China plane crash likely intentional, US reports say

Flight data indicates that the crash of the “China Eastern Airlines” airplane in March was intentionally.

Investigators have so far not found any mechanical or technical faults with the jet, the reports say.

The Boeing 737 was flying between the southern Chinese cities of Kunming and Guangzhou when it crashed. All 132 passengers and crew on board the plane died in the crash.

"The plane did what it was told to do by someone in the cockpit," said the Wall Street Journal, which first reported the story, citing a person familiar with the officials working on the report of the cause of the crash.

ABC News also reported that the crash was believed to have been caused by an intentional act.

Investigators looking into the crash are still trying to understand whether it was due to intentional action, or there are evidence of a technical malfunction.

China Eastern Airlines previously said the three pilots on board were qualified and in good health.

The airline told the Wall Street Journal that there was no indication that any of the pilots was in financial trouble.

The Civil Aviation Administration of China (CAAC), which is leading investigations into the crash, did not respond to a BBC request for comment.

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## Climate change increases risks of heatwaves in India and Pakistan

Climate change makes record heatwaves in northwest India and Pakistan 100 times more likely.

The region should now expect a heatwave that exceeds the record temperatures seen in 2010 once every three years.

Without climate change, such extreme temperatures would occur only once every 312 years, the National Meteorological Office says.

Forecasters say temperatures in north-west India could reach new highs in the coming days.

The new analysis comes from the World Meteorological Organisation, the UN's atmospheric science organization and is based on four key indicators of climate change: greenhouse gas concentrations, sea level rise, ocean heat and ocean acidification.

The extreme pre-monsoon heatwave the region northwest India and Pakistan have suffered in recent weeks eased a little after peak temperatures reached 51C in Pakistan on Saturday.

But the heat looks likely to build up again towards the end of this week and into the weekend. Temperatures are likely to reach 50C, with continued very high overnight temperatures.

A new study by “Met Office” organization is based on computer simulations, comparing how frequently a weather event is likely to occur in various scenarios. If climate change follows predictions, by the end of the century India and Pakistan can expect similarly high temperatures virtually every year.

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## Afghanistan quake: Many children killed in disaster, doctors say

Doctors in Afghanistan have told the BBC that many children may have been killed in Wednesday's earthquake. More than 1,000 people died in the disaster.

Unknown numbers were buried in the rubble of mud-built homes, by the magnitude 6.1 earthquake.

The Taliban authorities have called for more international aid. The United Nations is among those trying to provide emergency help, carrying food and medicines to remote areas, especially in the worst-hit Paktika province.

Communication networks are also badly hit. Afghanistan's health system was facing collapse even before the disaster.

Survivors have told the BBC of villages completely destroyed near the epicentre of the quake, of ruined roads and of their fears that the death toll will rise further. Some 1,500 people were also injured, officials say.

The deadliest earthquake to strike the country in two decades is a major challenge for the Taliban, the Islamist movement which regained power last year.

The earthquake struck early on Wednesday, about 44km (27 miles) from the city of Khost and tremors were felt as far away as Pakistan and India.

Afghanistan is in the middle of a humanitarian and economic crisis, and Abdul Qahar Balkhi, a senior Taliban official, said the government is "financially unable to assist the people to the extent that is needed".

## **What is inflation and what is its current rate in the UK and Europe?**

The Bank of England (BoE) defines inflation simply as a term used by economists to “describe the increase in prices over time”.

Rising costs in goods and services on the UK indicate that the value of the British pound is in decline, which in turn means a reduction in consumers’ purchasing power and therefore their quality of life, as they are discouraged from spending more than they can afford.

This in turn reduces national economic growth.

“A healthy economy needs to have a low and stable rate of inflation,” the central bank explains. “The government sets a target for how much prices overall should go up each year in the UK. That target is 2 per cent. It’s the Bank of England’s job to keep inflation at that target”.

“A little bit of inflation is helpful. But high and unstable rates of inflation can be harmful. If prices are unpredictable, it is difficult for people to plan how much they can spend, save or invest.

In extreme cases, high and volatile inflation can cause an economy to collapse. Zimbabwe is a good example. It experienced this in 2007-2009 when the price level increased by around 80 billion per cent in a single month. As a result, people simply refused to use Zimbabwean banknotes and the economy ground to a halt.

## **This is how inflation could affect house prices**

Will higher inflation mean even higher house prices? Or will the rising interest rates that are coming in (to try to control inflation) put a cap on prices in general, and especially property?

There can be no simple answers, of course. But the past few days have given us some clues as to the pace at which global interest rates are likely to rise. Tomorrow, chancellor Rishi Sunak will give some indications on inflation and growth of the UK economy. So this is a good week to try to make a judgement.

The clues on interest rates have come through over the past few days. Both the US Federal Reserve and the Bank of England increased rates last week. That was expected.

The really interesting new indications have been what Jerome Powell, the chair of the Fed, said on Monday, and how the market responds to that.

He said that (if it is necessary to do so) the Fed would increase rates faster and further than the markets expected. If that meant increasing rates by half a percent at the next meeting, rather than a quarter, it would do so. That's just in case in case people had not got the message that the Fed is serious about containing inflation.

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## Nearly 1,000 fighters have left Mariupol steelworks

Ukraine ordered the fighters of Mariupol steelworks to surrender - saving their lives - and said their mission to stop Russian forces was now complete. It is not clear how many fighters remain inside the stronghold, in the port city which is now largely reduced to rubble.

Russia's defence ministry says that 959 Ukrainian fighters from the Mariupol steelworks have been taken to Russian-controlled territory since Monday.

Ukraine is calling for a prisoner swap for the evacuated defenders, but their fate is currently uncertain. Ukraine has not said how many people it believes have left the complex.

Russia says the fighters will be treated according to international norms, but a senior Russian politician said "these criminals" should not be exchanged.

The battle for Mariupol appears to be over after a devastating siege that lasted nearly three months.

The fall of the port city would give Russia a land bridge to Crimea and control of the Sea of Azov, cutting off Ukraine's maritime trade.

Both sides are trying to shape the narrative and extract propaganda victories from what has been one of the most important battles of the war.



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## Ukraine war: Evidence shows widespread use of cluster munitions in Kharkiv

Russia has killed hundreds of civilians in the north-eastern Ukrainian city of Kharkiv using indiscriminate shelling and widely-banned cluster munitions, according to new research by Amnesty International.

Amnesty said it had found evidence of Russian forces repeatedly using cluster bombs, as well as rockets that eject smaller mines that explode later at timed intervals.

The BBC visited five separate impact sites in residential neighbourhoods in Kharkiv and saw evidence of a distinctive, symmetrical effect associated with cluster munitions. We showed images from the sites to three weapons experts, who all said the impacts were consistent with the controversial weapons.

"Those impacts are from cluster munitions, it's a classic signature," said Mark Hizney, a senior researcher in the arms division of Human Rights Watch. "And in one image you can see a remnant of a stabiliser from one of the submunitions," he said.

CCTV (closed circuit tv) registration passed to the BBC by a resident at one of the sites showed successive clustered detonations - "a very strong indicator of submunitions from a cluster weapon," said Hamish de Bretton Gordon, a former British Army colonel and Cambridge University weapons expert.

Cluster munitions are controversial because they detonate in the air and release a cluster of smaller bombs which fall indiscriminately over a wide area, potentially putting civilians at risk.

The smaller bombs also often fail to detonate on impact, posing a threat for years to come. More than 120 countries have signed a treaty prohibiting the use of the weapons - though neither Russia or Ukraine are signatories.

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## Netflix cuts 150 US-based jobs after losing subscribers

Netflix has laid off about 150 staff, just a month after the entertainment giant said it was losing subscribers for the first time in a decade.

In April, the streaming giant shocked the industry when it revealed it had lost 200,000 subscribers in the first three months of 2022, and warned another two million were expected to quit in the coming quarter.

While Netflix has 220 million subscribers globally and remains the clear market leader, it has faced fierce competition in recent years with the arrival of competitor platforms such as Disney Plus, HBO, and Amazon's Prime Video.

In its earnings report last month, the company also said the war in Ukraine and the decision to raise its prices in the US had cost it subscribers. Pulling out of the Russian market alone had cost the service 700,000 members, it revealed.

Netflix said the job losses were due to low company's revenue. "These changes are primarily driven by business needs rather than individual performance, which makes them especially difficult, as none of us want to say goodbye to such great colleagues," the company said in a statement.

It wasn't revealed which parts of the business would see job losses, but the Los Angeles Times reported that recruiting, communications and also the content department were all affected.

Some people also discovered their job loss online.

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## Europe to prepare for Russia turning off gas

The head of the International Energy Agency has warned that Russia may stop supplying gas to Europe this winter. Fatih Birol says he believes a complete shutdown is not the most likely scenario but that Europe needs to work on contingency plans just in case.

In recent weeks, several European countries said they received significantly less Russian gas than they expected. Russian officials deny it's deliberate and have blamed technical issues.

Before the invasion of Ukraine, Europe imported about 40% of its natural gas from Russia but that figure has now fallen to about 20%.

Mr Birol says he believes that recent Russian reductions in gas supply are "strategic". The falls are making it harder for European countries to fill up their gas storage before winter.

Last week the flow of natural gas through Nord Stream 1, one of the main pipelines from Russia to Europe, was just 40% of capacity. Many experts are sceptical of the Russian explanation that this was caused by "technical issues".

Across Europe, shortfalls in gas supply continue to be reported. On Friday the Italian energy firm Eni said that it had only received half of the gas that it was expecting from the Russian state-controlled gas giant Gazprom, while Slovakia and Austria have also reported falls.

France says it has received no Russian gas since 15 June while Poland, Bulgaria, Finland, Denmark and the Netherlands have had their Russian gas deliveries suspended after they refused a demand to pay in Russian roubles.



## European Green Deal

Climate change and environmental degradation are an existential threat to Europe and the world. To overcome these challenges, the European Green Deal will transform the EU into a modern, resource-efficient and competitive economy, ensuring:

- no net emissions of greenhouse gases by 2050
- economic growth decoupled from resource use
- no person and no place left behind

The European Commission adopted a set of proposals to make the EU's climate, energy, transport and taxation policies able to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by at least 55% by 2030, compared to 1990 levels.

In order to achieve our decarbonisation objectives, emissions must be reduced **in all sectors**, from industry and energy, to transport and farming. Climate change is a global threat and can only be addressed by a global response. That is why the EU actively cooperate with its international partners on climate action, in particular through the UN Convention of Climate Change (UNFCCC) and its Paris Agreement.

The European Green Deal will improve the well-being and health of citizens and future generations by providing fresh air, clean water, healthy soil and biodiversity, healthy and affordable food and global economic competitiveness.



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## **Global economic growth downgraded due to Ukraine war**

The global economy is expected to grow by only 3.1 per cent this year, down from the 4.0 per cent projected in January, because of the war in Ukraine, according to the UN's latest report.

The mid-year forecast reveals how the conflict has stopped the fragile economic recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, causing a humanitarian crisis in Europe, increasing food and commodity prices, and exacerbating inflationary pressures.

Global inflation is expected to reach 6.7 per cent this year, almost twice the average of 2.9 per cent during the period from 2010 to 2020, with sharp rises in food and energy prices.

Higher energy and food prices are particularly affecting developing economies, causing food insecurity, especially in Africa.

High inflation is also reducing the real income of households. Once again, this is especially the case in developing countries, where poverty is more prevalent and wage growth remains low.

Rising energy prices will also impact global efforts to address climate change. As countries are looking to expand energy supplies, fossil fuel production is likely to increase in the short term.



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## **Tech needs girls, and girls need tech**

The United Nations (UN) recognizes the need to ensure girls and women have equal access to digital learning opportunities, particularly in least developed countries.

Worldwide only 30 per cent of technology professionals are women. And, according to UN latest data, globally just 57 per cent of women use the Internet, compared to 62 per cent of men.

Furthermore, if women are unable to access the Internet and do not feel safe online, they are unable to develop the necessary digital skills, which diminishes their opportunities to enter careers in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM).

A recent study by UN shows that girls access digital technology at a later age than boys, and that in many countries their use of this technology is often forbidden by their parents.

In addition, young women and girls are disproportionately exposed to online violence and harassment, which can negatively impact their physical, mental, and emotional well-being, and influence how they use digital tools for the rest of their lives.

The celebration of worldwide “Girls in ICT Day” events underline UN’s commitment to encourage girls and young women everywhere to consider STEM career paths.

All over the world, girls and young women want to join the digital revolution. When we remove barriers of access and safety, women and girls can make remarkable contributions to ICT. To put it simply: tech needs girls, and girls need tech.



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## **UN focus on plant health, crucial for food security worldwide**

On the first International Day of Plant Health the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) has called for more investment in innovation to increase food security.

Healthy plants have the power to help end hunger, reduce poverty, protect the environment, and boost economic development. But even though plants make up 80 per cent of the food we eat, and provide 98 per cent of the oxygen we breathe, threats to their survival in many cases, are increasing.

According to recent data, up to 40 per cent of food crops are lost due to plant diseases every year, and this affects both food security and agriculture, the main source of income for vulnerable rural communities.

Climate change and human activities are also altering ecosystems and damaging biodiversity.

The protection of plants is essential for people and for the planet, and that is why the UN Food and Agriculture Organization has mapped several priorities for plant health.

Having established the International Day of Plant Health (IDPH) will help to raise global awareness on the importance of protecting plant health, end hunger, reduce poverty, protect biodiversity and the environment, and boost economic development.



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## **Human rights must be at heart of solution to Sri Lanka crisis**

The severe economic crisis in Sri Lanka shows no signs of ending any time soon, with the country's newly installed Prime Minister, warning of more difficult days ahead.

Since the start of the crisis, the United Nations (UN) has tracked over 1000 protests. Initially these were peaceful, driven by citizen participation, and characterized by calls for a change of the government. But as the shortage of gas and fuel became more prominent, we started witnessing violence. Some 60 houses were set on fire, around eight people killed, and several more injured.

The UN has been working for many months to help Sri Lanka. We have tried to support and reduce the impact on the most vulnerable groups, and we are working very closely with the international financial institutes like the World Bank.

UN work is not only about addressing the immediate needs of the population but also about preventing deep crises. So, we must help to avoid Sri Lanka going backward in areas such as access to health and education.

We all know the history of Sri Lanka (despite what is currently happening, the country is a model in Southeast Asia) so we have to maintain a vision of how to ensure social cohesion, avoiding discrimination that could undermine human rights.



**ANSA<sup>en</sup> Latest News****Fake 'Italian food products' are worth up to 120bn**

The global value of fake “Italian food products” has risen to an annual 120 billion euros, Coldiretti group said on Monday.

"Due to the continued rise of *Italian sounding* brands, over two-thirds of 'Italian' food products in the world are now fake. Among the most 'cloned' products are cheeses, led by Parmigiano Reggiano and Grana Padano. Other top cloned-brands are iconic Parma and San Daniele ham and mortadella from Bologna, said Coldiretti.

Richer countries are more likely to have false *Italian sounding* products, such as the US, where the business is worth some 40 billion euros. Italy is to step up the fight against Italian food fakes, Foreign Minister Luigi Di Maio told during the meeting of Federalimentare.

Di Maio said that "damaging practices, like *Italian sounding*, have reached worrying proportions, especially in the agri-food sector". The Italian foreign ministry, he said, was engaged in "an intense action of combating the counterfeiting of Italian goods on a global scale".

In 2008 The European Court of Justice said Germany broke European Union rules by allowing the name 'Parmesan' to be used for a German cheese that mimicked Italian Parmigiano Reggiano. Parmigiano Reggiano has the EU's Protected Designation of Origin (PDO) status. The Parmigiano Reggiano Consortium has become strongly engaged in defending its product's name from improper use. It first scored a key legal victory several years ago when it managed to stop an American cheesemaker from using the Parmigiano tag on its goods.

Parmigiano Reggiano continues to be sold in cloned versions in South America, Japan and Britain, while in France 'parmesan' refers exclusively to the Italian cheese. In Brazil a pirated version is marketed as Parmesao, while Argentina calls its fake parmesan Regianito.

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## Sri Lanka made default on debt for first time in its history

Sri Lanka has made default on its debt for the first time in its history as the country struggles with its worst financial crisis in more than 70 years.

A payment of \$78m debt interest expired last Wednesday.

The governor of Sri Lanka's central bank said the country was now in a "pre - emptive (preventive) default".

Defaults happen when governments are unable to meet some or all of their debt payments to creditors.

It can damage a country's reputation, making it harder to borrow the money it needs on international markets, which can further harm confidence in its currency and economy.

Asked whether the country was now in default, central bank governor said: <<Our position is very clear; we said that until they (the creditors) would not agree to the debt-restructuring, we will not be able to pay. So that's what we call "pre-emptive default".>>

<<There can be technical definitions... from their side they can consider it a default>> he added.

Sri Lanka is seeking to restructure debts of more than \$50bn it owes to foreign creditors, to make it more manageable to repay.

The country's economy has been hit hard by the pandemic and rising energy prices. A chronic shortage of foreign currency and soaring inflation have led to a severe shortage of medicines, fuel and other essentials.

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## Royal Mail warns it will put prices up again

The prices of stamps are likely to rise again in UK, as Royal Mail tries to cover higher costs, including wages, energy and fuel expenses.

The firm said it would try to “mitigate” the costs through “price increases and growth initiatives”. Earlier this year, the firm increased first class stamp prices by 10p, up to 95p, and second class stamps by 2p, up to 68p. This comes after Royal Mail warned it was facing significant problems from rising costs.

It also said it will need to cut costs more as a result, increasing its target to over £350m from £290m set previously. Royal Mail said it was also continuing to change the business, as its parcel business becomes more important than letter delivery.

Letter volumes have fallen by more than 60% since their peak in 2004-05 and by about 20% since the pandemic began. Meanwhile, parcel deliveries increased during the pandemic.

Simon Thompson, chief executive of Royal Mail, said: <<As we emerge from the pandemic, the need to accelerate the transformation of our business, particularly in delivery, has become more urgent>> He also said that the company plans to cut around 700 management jobs to reduce costs in the middle of a growing competition from rivals.

The move, part of a restructuring plan, comes as the firm faces heavy criticism over postal delays.

## Pollution caused one in six deaths worldwide in 2019

Pollution was responsible for 9 million deaths in 2019 – equivalent to one in six deaths worldwide – according to a new report published in “The Lancet Planetary Health” journal.

The report found that the total number of deaths is virtually unchanged since the last analysis in 2015, while the number of deaths attributable to industrial pollution has increased. The vast majority – 92 per cent of pollution-related deaths – happen in low-income and middle-income countries, it said.

“Despite its enormous health, social and economic impacts, pollution prevention is largely overlooked in the international development agenda,” said Richard Fuller, the lead author of the report. “Attention and funding has only minimally increased since 2015, despite well documented increases in public concern about pollution and its health effects.”

Of the nine million deaths attributed to pollution in 2019, air pollution was responsible for 6.67 million, water pollution for 1.36 million, lead pollution for 900,000.

The authors found that the number of deaths associated with extreme poverty conditions (the so-called “traditional pollution” such as indoor air pollution and water pollution) had decreased since 2000. They said this was particularly evident in Africa due to improvements in water supply, sanitation and cleaner fuels.

## Solar panels to be mandatory on all new buildings

Solar panels would be mandatory on all new buildings in the European Union under a new proposal aimed at ending the dependence on Russian fossil fuels by 2027 and supercharging the transition to green energy.

The “solar rooftop initiative” in the European Commission’s REPowerEU plan would introduce a legal obligation to install solar panels on new public and commercial buildings, as well as new residential buildings.

The initiative is part of the commission’s plan to speed up renewable energy use, to give a boost to the green transition and reduce energy prices over time.

The goal is to bring online over 320 GigaWatts of solar photovoltaic energy by 2025 (more than doubling from 2020) and almost 600 GW by 2030.

The plan has three main pillars: energy savings, diversification of energy supplies, and accelerated roll-out of renewable energy.

The commission has said the plan will require an additional investment of € 210bn between now and 2027 from the private and public sector across Europe.

By 2030, solar energy will also be the largest electricity source in the EU with more than half coming from rooftops, said Kadri Simson, the EU commissioner for energy.

## **How to realise the potential of a hybrid work model**

The pandemic has irrevocably changed office culture, rapidly evolving a trend for remote working into a core part of the employee experience. While remote working is here to stay, the consensus from employees themselves is that a return to some regular office-based interaction is important. In fact, Barco (a research agency) shows in a recent report that eight out of ten office workers are in favour of a hybrid work model, with most willing to work from home just one and a half days per week.

Understanding this, most businesses have already started to implement various kinds of long-term hybrid systems, which can offer a mix of office-based and remote working.

This is, of course, great news, not only for the employee experience, but also the overall performance of businesses. Such hybrid models should, in effect, offer white-collar workers the best of both worlds – that is, more time to work productively and stress-free from home, as well as an opportunity to catch up with colleagues at the office for important meetings.

However, as with the implementation of any new system of working, there are challenges to overcome. If hybrid business models are to be productive and successful, then technology issues must first be acknowledged and resolved.

65 per cent of workers admitted to have difficulties with meeting room set-ups (like Zoom etc.), and a further 48 per cent with connecting peripherals such as displays, cameras, speakers and microphones.

## Scientists create tool to kill cyber attacks in ‘less than a second’

A new tool that could automatically detect and kill cyber attacks on computers and other devices in under a second has been created by researchers at Cardiff University.

The new method uses artificial intelligence to monitor and predict the behaviour of malicious software – malware – rather than using the traditional antivirus approach of analysing what a piece of malware looks like.

According to the researchers, the method has been shown able to prevent up to 92% of files on a computer from being corrupted, and takes on average 0.3 seconds to wipe out a piece of malware.

The method has been developed in collaboration with Airbus and takes advantage of technological advances in artificial intelligence.

Study co-author Professor Pete Burnap said: “Traditional antivirus software will look at the code structure of a piece of malware and say ‘yeah, that looks familiar’. But the problem is malware authors will just change the code, so the next day the code looks different and is not detected by the antivirus software.”

Matilda Rhode, lead author of the study said: “While we still have some way to go in terms of improving the accuracy of this system, this is an important step towards an automated real-time protection system; it would not only benefit our laptops and computers, but also our smart speakers, thermostats, cars and refrigerators as the ‘internet of things’ becomes part of our life.”

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## Monkeypox: 80 cases confirmed in 12 countries

The World Health Organization (WHO) has said another 50 suspected cases are being investigated - without naming any countries - and warned that more cases are likely to be reported.

Infections have been confirmed in nine European countries, as well as the US, Canada and Australia.

Monkeypox is most common in remote parts of Central and West Africa.

It is a rare viral infection from which most people recover in a few weeks, according to the UK's National Health Service.

The virus does not spread easily between people and the risk to the wider public is said to be very low.

There is no specific vaccine for monkeypox. In a statement on Friday, the WHO said that the recent outbreaks "are atypical, as they are occurring in non-endemic countries". It is not yet clear why this unusual outbreak is happening now.

One possibility is that the virus has changed in some way, although currently there is little evidence to suggest this is a new variant.

Another explanation is that the virus has found itself in the right place at the right time to spread.





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## **“COVID-19 is not over”, World Health Organization warns**

The head of the World Health Organization (WHO) told on Sunday that although reported COVID-19 cases and deaths have declined significantly, it is not time to lower the guard.

Tedros Gebreyesus delivered his message during the World Health Organization annual assembly: <<So, is it COVID-19 over? No, it’s not over. I know that’s not the message you want to hear, and it’s definitely not the message I want to deliver>> he highlighted.

He added that although in many countries all restrictions have been lifted and life looks much like it did before the pandemic, reported cases are increasing in almost 70 countries. Tedros warned that reported deaths are also rising in Africa, the continent with the lowest vaccination coverage.

While agreeing that there is progress with 60% of the world’s population already vaccinated, Tedros reminded that almost one billion people in lower-income countries remain unvaccinated. **“It’s not over anywhere until it’s over everywhere... Only 57 countries have vaccinated 70% of their population – almost all of them high-income countries”**, he noted.

The WHO chief also warned that increasing transmission means more deaths and more risk of a new variant emerging, and the current decline of testing and sequencing means “we are blinding ourselves to the evolution of the virus”.

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## Starbucks withdraws name from Russia after 15 years

Starbucks Corp is withdrawing its brand from Russia after 15 years, the latest Western corporation to quit the country after the war in Ukraine.

The coffee-shop chain said it is going to close its business in Russia, after suspending operations there in March.

Starbucks entered Russia in 2007 and had grown to include 130 coffee shops. The move comes as the war continues, with no clear end in sight.

The US and Western allies responded to the war by hitting Russia with wide range of economic sanctions aimed at isolating it economically and cutting it off from the global financial system. The rules make it difficult for Western companies to operate there.

Starbucks had stopped shipments to Russia in March. It said it had now "made the decision to exit and no longer have a brand presence in the market".

It did not give details of the financial impact of the decision, but said it would continue to pay nearly 2,000 staff at Starbucks shops in the country for six months and provide assistance to partners "to transition to new opportunities outside of Starbucks".

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## Canada to ban China's Huawei and ZTE from its 5G networks

Canada says it will ban two of China's biggest telecoms equipment makers from working on its 5G phone networks. The restrictions against Huawei and ZTE were announced by the country's industry minister on Thursday.

The minister says the move will improve Canada's mobile internet services and "protect the security of Canadians".

Huawei said it was "disappointed" by the decision, which it said was "political". <<This is an unfortunate political decision that has nothing to do with cyber security or any of the technologies in question>> the company said.

Several nations - including the UK, US, Australia and New Zealand - have already put restrictions on the two firms.

The four countries, along with Canada, make up an intelligence-sharing agreement named "Five Eyes". It evolved during the Cold War as a mechanism for monitoring the Soviet Union and sharing classified information.

Canada's announcement was widely expected, as its allies had already banned Huawei and ZTE from their own high-speed networks.

Speaking to reporters in the Canadian capital of Ottawa, industry minister said the decision came after "a detailed report by our security agencies and consultation with our closest allies".

## **A meteor measuring more than 5,000 ft wide is moving at a great speed towards Earth this week**

A meteor measuring a 5,000 ft wide is heading towards Earth, NASA has confirmed. The enormous asteroid named 7335 is 1.1 miles in diameter and will head past Earth on Friday.

It is one of the biggest “Near Earth Objects” to pass by the planet in recent times and has been described as 'potentially hazardous' by NASA.

NASA's has stated that the object is travelling at 29,348 miles per hour (that's 14 times faster than a bullet) and it will reach the closest point to us on Friday afternoon.

NASA said: “Experts estimate that an impact of an object the size of the one that exploded over Chelyabinsk, Russia, in 2013 – approximately 55 feet in size – takes place once or twice a century. “Impacts of larger objects are expected to be far less frequent (on the scale of centuries to millennia).

While 7335 will miss Earth, there has been evidence of an asteroid hitting our planet as recently as earlier this month. A meteor may have dropped in south Wales, scientists said.

Experts believe the meteorite fell somewhere near Bridgend, after a fireball was seen in the sky on Thursday 12 May, and photos of the spectacle were reported widely on social media.



## **State of Schengen: EU Commission sets new priorities and new governance model**

Today, the Commission is presenting the “State of Schengen Report 2022”. This is the first time the Commission is presenting such report, following last year's “Schengen Strategy”. This report is part of the Commission's initiative to reinforce the Schengen governance through a yearly reporting exercise, identifying priorities for the year ahead and monitoring progress made at the end of a given year.

Vice President Margaritis Schinas said: <<The Schengen area has unified our continent and is emblematic of the European way of life. Over the past year we have taken decisive steps to further strengthen Schengen's governance and rebuild trust in this crucial driver of our economies.>>

Commissioner for Home Affairs Ylva Johansson said: <<The freedom to move, live and work in different Member States is held dear by Europeans. Recent crises and challenges have shown that we cannot take this freedom for granted. We will keep working together>>

The report sets a list of priority actions for 2022-2023 that are to be addressed at both national and European level.

The report also reminds of the importance of completing the Schengen area and calls upon the Council to adopt the decisions to allow Croatia, as well as Romania and Bulgaria to formally become a part of it, in view of the fact that all criteria have been fulfilled

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## Airbnb to quit China as lockdowns restrict tourism

Airbnb is shutting down its domestic rentals in China, where a "zero-Covid" policy has meant lockdowns are ongoing. All listings for homes in the country will be removed from the company's website by summer, a source familiar with the matter told the BBC.

Rentals within China made up only 1% of Airbnb's revenue over the last few years. The company is expected to instead focus on Chinese residents travelling abroad to other destinations.

Before the pandemic, Chinese travellers heading abroad had tripled in less than a decade, reaching 155 million journeys in 2019, according to the United Nations World Tourism Organisation.

But since 2020, China has had some of the toughest Covid restrictions in the world, making travel in the country extremely difficult.

Airbnb opened its business in China in 2016. Since then, some 25 million guests have booked stays there through the online home rental company.

But the domestic rental operation for travellers visiting China had been complicated even before the pandemic.

For example, guest's details were to be sent to the Chinese government in line with local laws, and the company has faced strong competition from native Chinese platforms.

**ANSA<sup>en</sup> Latest News****Russia “hasn't seen” Italian peace plan**

Kremlin Spokesman Dmitry Peskov said Tuesday that the Russian government has not yet seen the Italian peace plan for Ukraine, adding that Moscow hoped to receive it soon via diplomatic channels.

Italy's four-stage plan is based on a ceasefire, talks on Ukraine's 'international status' (whether it is neutral or not), a bilateral agreement between Kyiv and Moscow on the contested areas of Crimea and Donbass, and a multilateral agreement on peace and security in Europe.

Former Russian President Dmitri Medvedev, however, has given the thumbs down to the plan. <<The sensation is that it was not prepared by diplomats but by local political commentators who have read provincial newspapers and operate on the basis of fake Ukrainian news>> he said. Medvedev also said the Donbass area would never return to Kyiv's control.

Previously, on Monday, Russian vice-Foreign Minister Andrei Rudenko said that Russia was studying the Italian peace plan for UKraine. <<Moscow is studying Italy's plan to resolve the situation in Ukraine>>

Josep Borrell, the EU's High Representative for Foreign Affairs, said Friday that the European Union has "taken note" of the four-stage plan Italy is proposing for peace in Ukraine after the Russian invasion. <<We support any effort to end the conflict>> he added <<But, according to the European point of view, this must start from the immediate end of the attack and the unconditional withdrawal of the Russian army.>>

## ANSA<sup>en</sup> Latest News

### Italian monkeypox cases rise to five

Italian monkeypox cases rose to five Tuesday as another case was found at the Spallanzani Hospital in Rome. The hospital said the new case had "clinical and transmission characteristics similar to the previous ones".

The number of Italian monkeypox cases rose to four Monday after the South-East Tuscany health authority said a 32-year-old man who returned to Arezzo on May 15 from a holiday in the Canary Islands had the disease. The news came after the report that the virus has been sequenced for the first time in Portugal. The Arezzo man is being treated at Arezzo's San Donato hospital. It is the first case in Tuscany.

Four other men are being treated at the Spallanzani, in Rome. And 15 men who had been in contact with them are now self-isolating across the Lazio region surrounding Rome, the hospital said.

The first Italian case of monkeypox, also regarded a man who had recently returned from a stay in the Canary Islands.

Monkeypox was first discovered in 1958 when two outbreaks of a pox-like disease occurred in colonies of monkeys kept for research, hence the name 'monkeypox.' The first human case of monkeypox was recorded in 1970 in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Since then monkeypox had mainly been reported in humans in other central and western African countries.



## ANSA<sup>en</sup> Latest News

### **Milky Way black hole photographed, proving its existence**

The European Southern Observatory (ESO) said Thursday that astronomers have for the first time photographed the supermassive black hole at the centre of our Milky Way galaxy, proving that the object is indeed a black hole.

The image of the black hole, known as Sagittarius A, was produced by a global research team called the Event Horizon Telescope (EHT), using observations from a worldwide network of radio telescopes.

Experts from Italy's National Institute of Astrophysics, National Institute of Nuclear Physics, Naples' Federico II University and Cagliari University took part in the project.

<<It's an extraordinary achievement that shows how important international cooperation is in the scientific field and how important it is for Italy to be part of it>> said University and Research Minister Maria Cristina Messa. <<We will only realize the importance of this extraordinary result over time>> she added.

The new achievement comes after the EHT's release of the first image of a black hole, called M87, at the centre of the more distant Messier 87 galaxy, in 2019.

This research on the image of the Milky Way Black Hole was presented and published on Thursday in "The Astrophysical Journal".

## Gunman kills 19 children, 2 teachers at Texas elementary school

Texas, May 24 - A teenage murdered at least 19 children and two teachers after entering into a Texas elementary school on Tuesday. This is the latest gun-mass killing in the United States and the nation's worst school shooting in nearly a decade.

The carnage began with the 18-year-old suspect, identified as Salvador Ramos, shooting his own grandmother, who survived, authorities said.

He fled that scene and crashed his car near the Robb Elementary School in Uvalde, Texas, a town about 80 miles west of San Antonio. Police officers saw the car accident and the gunman (wearing body armour) emerging from the crashed vehicle, carrying a rifle. The police officers try to stop him, but he nevertheless managed to enter into the school and open fire. His fury ended when he was killed, shot by police.

Speaking from the White House hours later, President Joe Biden urged Americans to stop the politically powerful gun-lobby. <<As a nation, we have to ask, “When in God's name are we going stop to the gun lobby?”>> Biden said on national television, suggesting a U.S. ban on assault-style weapons.

Mass shootings in America have frequently led to public protests and calls for stricter rules on gun sales and other firearm controls, but such measures have always failed to be approved in the face of strong Republican-led opposition.

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## Australian methane emissions massively underestimated

The amount of greenhouse gas leaking from Australian coal mines has been hugely underestimated, a report says. And, unless quick action is taken, it could prevent the country from reaching its emission reduction targets.

The new report analysed methane being released from coal mines, finding the amount is twice the official estimates. Australia's new government has promised to cut emissions faster than its predecessor, but it has not excluded supporting new coal mines.

Reducing emissions from methane - a potent greenhouse gas - is a focus for world leaders. The US, the EU and Indonesia - the world's biggest coal exporter - were among more than 100 countries that last year promised a 30% cut in methane emissions by 2030.

Australia ranks second for coal exports and is among the world's top methane emitters, but it did not sign on to the agreement. Methane is estimated to be responsible for almost a third of the globe's warming since pre-industrial times.

In 2019, Australia's coal mines emitted 898,000 tonnes of methane, according to the federal industry department. But the new report has found current methods of calculating those emissions are wrong - in the worst case by a factor of 10.

Previous estimates have been based on how much coal is produced rather than measuring how much gas leaked from mines, the report said. Recent research using satellites have given a more accurate picture of pollution and have been adopted by the International Energy Agency (IEA).

The IEA has estimated Australian coal mines emitted 1.8 million tonnes of methane in 2021, double the latest officially reported figures, the report said.

Existing technologies - if applied to all underground mines - have the potential to cut Australia's methane emissions by about 45%, the report said. Prime Minister Anthony Albanese's government has not commented on the report, but it previously said it will not leave "emissions intensive" industries - like mining - at a disadvantage to their global competitors.



## Strategic raw materials

By 2030, 30 million electric cars are expected to be on our roads. An equal number of batteries will need to be produced. For this reason, access to raw materials is becoming more critical every day.

For lithium, cobalt and graphite, Europe remains heavily dependent on supplies from third countries (China in the lead), which can be as much as 100% for refined lithium, for example.

The same is true for electric-motors, and more particularly for the permanent magnets that compose them, and for which China controls the entire value chain.

In the past year alone, prices for “rare earths” used to make permanent magnets have risen by 50-90%. Without better access to raw materials, our goals of zero-emission mobility are at risk, due to raw material shortages or rising costs.

The same could also be told about silicon, which is essential for both photovoltaic and semiconductors. The evidence is the same: demand is expected to increase fivefold by 2030.

While demand is increasing dramatically due to the digital and green transition of our society, we are too often entirely dependent on imports, while international supply chains are increasingly unstable.

Above all, we need the capacity to separate, refine and recycle raw materials. There would be no point in having stable partnerships in raw materials if we were to remain dependent in the refining phase, for example.



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## **1.1 million Afghan children could face severe malnutrition**

UNICEF, the United Nations (U.N.) children's agency, said 1.1 million Afghan children this year are expected to suffer from severe malnutrition, nearly double the number in 2018 and up from just under 1 million last year.

“Severe malnutrition” is the most lethal type of malnutrition, in which food is so lacking that a child's immune system is compromised, according to UNICEF. Children become vulnerable to multiple type of diseases and eventually they become so weak they can't absorb nutrients.

The numbers of children under 5 being admitted into hospitals with severe malnutrition have increased, from 16,000 in March 2020 to 18,000 in March 2021, then to 28,000 in March 2022, the UNICEF representative in Afghanistan, Mohamed Ag Ayoya, wrote in a tweet last week.

Hit by one of its worst droughts in decades and by years of war, Afghanistan was already facing a hunger emergency; but the Taliban takeover in August threw the country into crisis. Many development agencies exited the country and international sanctions cut off billions in finances for the collapsing the economy.

Millions of people are in poverty, struggling to afford food for their families. By the end of last year, half the population of around 38 million lived under the poverty line, according to U.N. figures. As the economy continues to collapse and prices to increase, the poverty may involve 97% of the population by mid-2022.

Because of poverty, mothers do not have proper nutrition during pregnancy, and are not able to eat properly after birth, said Mohammad Sharif, a doctor at Charakar hospital.



## US sending \$1 billion more military aid to Ukraine

The U.S. announced it will send an additional \$1 billion in military aid to Ukraine; America and its allies will provide longer-range weapons that, they say, can make a difference in a fight where Ukrainian forces are outnumbered by their Russian invaders.

President Joe Biden and his national security advisers said Wednesday the U.S. is moving as fast as possible to get critical weapons to the fight, even as Ukrainian officials protest that they need more weapons and faster deliveries, in order to survive.

The latest package, the U.S. said, includes anti-ship missile and mobile artillery system called HIMARS. These are key weapons systems that Ukrainian leaders have urgently requested as they battle to stop Russia's march to conquer the eastern Donbas region.

The HIMARS and anti-ship systems are the kinds of longer-range weapon that, over time, can make a difference in the war.

This aid is the largest single tranche of weapons and equipment since the war began. Biden, who spoke by phone with Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelenskyy for about 40 minutes Wednesday, also said the U.S. will also send \$225 million in humanitarian assistance to provide drinking water, medical supplies, food etc.

Since the war began in late February, the U.S. has sent about \$5.6 billion of goods to Ukraine. Officials said about this last package that the Pentagon will take one-third of the \$1 billion weapons and equipment from its own stock and ship them to Ukraine. The remaining two-thirds would be equipment and weapons purchased from industry by the U.S. and then transferred to Ukraine.



## North Korea fires an intercontinental ballistic missile and 2 other missiles

North Korea is suspected to have launched an intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) and two shorter-range weapons toward its eastern waters Wednesday - South Korea said - hours after President Joe Biden ended a trip to Asia where he reaffirmed the U.S. commitment to defend its allies in the face of the North's nuclear threat.

The ICBM didn't fly its full range. But, if confirmed, it would still be North Korea's first test of an ICBM system in about two months, in the middle of the stalled diplomacy with the United States. The launch suggests North Korea is determined to continue its efforts to modernize its arsenal despite its first COVID-19 outbreak, which has caused worries about a humanitarian disaster.

<<North Korea's sustained provocations can only result in stronger and faster South Korea-U.S. combined deterrence and can only deepen North Korea's international isolation>> the South Korean government said in a statement after an emergency security meeting.

Japanese Defense Minister Nobuo Kishi called the launches "an act of provocation and absolutely impermissible."

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken held separate calls with his counterparts from South Korea and Japan during which they condemned the launches as a clear violation of multiple U.N. Security Council resolutions.

Kim Tae-hyo, South Korea's national security adviser, told reporters that the first launch involved the North's biggest Hwasong-17 missile, whose potentially can reach U.S. mainland. He said the missile was fired at a high angle and that its launch appeared aimed at controlling the weapon's propellant and stage separations, though he couldn't conclusively say whether the test was successful or not.



## Delegations from Sweden and Finland in Turkey for NATO talks

Senior officials from Sweden and Finland met with Turkish counterparts in Ankara on Wednesday in an effort to overcome Turkey's strong objections to the Nordic nations' requests to join NATO.

Sweden and Finland submitted their written applications to join NATO last week. The move represents one of the biggest geopolitical ramifications of Russia's war in Ukraine and could rewrite Europe's security map.

Turkey has said it opposes the countries' membership in the Western military alliance, citing problems with a *perceived* Sweden's — and a to a lesser extent Finland's — support of the Kurdistan Workers' Party, or PKK, and other entities that Turkey views as security threats.

The PKK, which is listed as a terror organization by several of Turkey's allies, has carried on a decades-long insurgency against Turkey, a conflict that has cost the lives of tens of thousands people.

The Turkish government also accuses Finland and Sweden of imposing arms exports restrictions on Turkey and refusing to extradite suspected "terrorists."

Turkey's objections have dampened Stockholm's and Helsinki's hopes for joining NATO quickly.



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## Ukraine war: 'This is just the beginning, everything is still to come'

The Ukrainian army is now under more pressure than at any time, after the first desperate week of the Russian invasion. It could be fighting a losing battle in Luhansk, the northern part of Donbas region.

The Ukrainian General staff says the Russians appear to be concentrating their forces for another strike. In the last days, the Russians have intensified their attacks across the Donbas front line - getting closer to completing the encirclement of Severodonetsk, a city of 80,000 before the invasion.

The Ukrainians, as usual, are fighting with determination, while reinforcements are arriving into the battle.

BBC reporter in Dnipro in just a few minutes saw about 20 armoured vehicles with soldiers riding on them, driving to the front line - along with tanks and multiple rocket launchers. They have slowed the Russians down but have not stopped the offensive. The Russians are inflicting heavy casualties. A military source in the 57th Brigade told that one of their units went into the front-line with 240 men and came out with about 140 - the rest of them killed, wounded or captured.

Ukraine's President Zelensky has said the Russians could be killing up to 100 Ukrainian soldiers a day in Donbas.

Not far from Severodonetsk, Bakhmut is a town getting slowly destroyed by the war. This week it is about three miles from the Russians, well within the range of guns. Next week it might be much closer. Civilians with somewhere to go have left. In the ruins in Donbas, the victory in Kyiv in March - the euphoria, glory and sacrifice - feel distant.

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## Monkeypox: Cases detected in three more countries for first time

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) has become the first Gulf state to record a case of monkeypox.

The Czech Republic and Slovenia also reported their first cases on Tuesday, joining 18 other countries to detect the virus outside its usual Africa base.

That number is expected to rise further, but experts say the overall risk to the general population remains low. Outbreaks of the virus have been found in Europe, Australia and America.

The symptoms often include a fever and rash - but the infection is usually mild.

In the UAE, health officials announced that the case had been detected in a traveller who had recently visited west Africa and is now receiving medical treatment. Authorities say they are "fully prepared" to handle any outbreak, adding that surveillance protocols for detecting the disease were in place.

The World Health Organization (WHO) says the virus can be contained with the right response in countries outside of Africa, where it is not usually detected. <<We encourage everyone to increase the surveillance of monkeypox>> the WHO's said at a conference on Tuesday. <<The outbreaks may not be normal, but remain containable>>.

Monkeypox is usually associated with travel to Central or West Africa, but some of the cases registered outside Africa have had no link to travel in the country.

Monkeypox does not spread easily between people, but it can be spread through:

- touching clothing or towels used by someone with the monkeypox
- the coughs or sneezes of a person with the monkeypox

If you get infected with monkeypox, it usually takes between five and 21 days for the first symptoms to appear.

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## US midterm elections - a simple guide

Believe it or not, just two years after Joe Biden was voted into the White House, election season has arrived in the US again.

Competitions have begun to determine the candidates for the “midterm elections” - so called because they fall halfway through a president's term.

Americans are represented in government by 535 lawmakers, known as members of Congress.

Congress is made up of two chambers - the Senate and the House of Representatives. The two work together to make laws.

The Senate is the 100-strong upper chamber. Each US state - regardless of size - sends two representatives. These senators are elected for six-year terms. Every two years a third of the Senate faces re-election.

The House of Representatives (often referred to as "the House") has 435 members. Each one represents a particular district in their state and serves a two year term. All seats are up for election.

Historically, the party that holds the White House has suffered losses in the midterms. A heavy defeat will make it harder for the president Biden to introduce new laws.

## **India's wheat export ban: Bad economics, good politics, modest impact**

The Indian government's ban on wheat exports has been seen as potentially aggravating record-high wheat prices and shortages caused by Russia's war in Ukraine. But, in the absolute sense, the impact on traded volumes will be relatively minor; markets have calmed, even as prices remain high because of war, persistent supply chain issues, and higher fertilizer and shipment costs.

The export restrictions reflect Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government's domestic and international political view. Internationally, the ban (exempting countries at government's discretion) strengthens Modi's position for helping partner countries, expanding Indian influence in the Middle East.

During price crises (especially unexpected crises caused by non-weather-related factors), food-exporting countries restrict their exports to ensure adequate domestic supplies and low inflation, thereby shielding their consumers (and voters) from price increases. To some extent, these policies are successful, both in terms of reducing prices (India's domestic wheat price dropped 10 to 15 percent on the news) and assuring political support.

As a result, India's move has been unpopular with farmers who have been cut off from continuing to benefit from record-high prices but welcomed, especially by urban consumers.

In the short run, such policies depress farmers' incomes and export revenues, consisting to an "implicit tax on farmers".

## How to Fix Economic Inequality?

In the past few decades, the Gini coefficient (a standard measure of income distribution across population segments) increased within most high-income economies. This means that a gap has been growing between the rich and poor in advanced economies. The United States remains the most unequal high-income economy in the world.

At the same time, the US middle class is shrinking. The percent of Americans in the middle class has dropped since the 1970s, from 61 percent in 1971 to 51 percent in 2019

But while inequality within countries has worsened, global inequality has declined, in large part because of globalization. Inequality between the poorest and richest people in the world has noticeably declined in recent decades. Trade has been a critical driver of this improvement, cutting the number living in extreme poverty by half since 1990, according to the World Bank.

Then the coronavirus pandemic struck, costing over a million lives globally by the end of October 2020 and causing the worst global recession in nearly a century. The people most vulnerable to an economic shock have been hit the hardest.

Now, these health and economic crisis, are raising moral, social, economic, and political challenges. As the United States and other countries fight to rebuild their economies, governments have the opportunity to alleviate economic disparities and improve access to opportunities.

This guide puts together researches from the world's leading experts on inequality trends. It also add a list of available policy options to mitigate the gap; mostly for the United States, with lessons applicable to other advanced countries.

(continues...)

## **The UK and the global economy after Brexit**

Brexit has reduced UK trade opportunities, foreign direct investment (FDI), and immigration growth. New border frictions and higher transport costs pose new barriers to trade, and FDI inflows are unlikely to return to levels reached in the 1990s and 2000s.

UK trade is recovering from the shock of the pandemic much more slowly than its partners in Europe and the Pacific region. The large European economies recovered quickly; trade as a share of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) had surpassed pre-pandemic levels by the end of 2021 for every EU country. Trade in the large advanced economies in the Asia-Pacific has also largely recovered. Meanwhile, UK trade as a share of GDP is still below its pre-pandemic level and is more than 6 percent below its 2017 level.

The UK is no longer one of the most open economies to immigrants among its partners. From 2015 through 2020, the UK was the only economy among the large EU economies that reported a slowdown in its immigrant population growth from the previous five-year period. Its recent trajectory was the same as the United States', which has been disengaging from the global economy under President Trump administration.

The UK in past years has attracted more foreign direct investment (FDI) than other comparable economies (since the 1970s); this was the reason for higher wage growth, more innovation and technological advancement. But FDI has decreased since the Brexit referendum, and the UK is no longer a leader.

The final effects of this shrinkage in trade, FDI, and immigration still remain to be seen and will depend on the UK government's response. But it could do lasting damage to the UK economy.



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## **United Nations (UN) report finds ‘limited progress’ on human rights protections in Iraq**

A recent UN report describes “limited progress” towards justice for human rights violations committed against dissenters in Iraq.

Between 1 May 2021 and 15 May this year, the report notes an increase in politically motivated violence during the pre and post-election period. The authors explain that in October last year, parliamentary elections took place in an “unprecedented wave of demonstrations” which were marked by violence, excessive use of force, and killings of hundreds people.

According to latest news, the biggest party to emerge from the vote, led by Shia religious leader, Muqtada al-Sadr, has still been unable to put together a new government coalition.

The UN report found that Iraqi authorities have taken just “limited steps” to investigate the unlawful killing and injury of protestors, saying that “much more needs to be done to identify, arrest and prosecute the perpetrators of those crimes, including those responsible for ordering and planning them”.

Meanwhile, a climate of impunity for human rights violations has widespread; civic rights remains limited and those expressing dissent are at risk of reprisal from armed elements.

The UN recommends that the Government of Iraq conduct independent and credible investigations of all human rights violations and abuse perpetrated against protestors, activists, journalists, and critics.

It must also work harder to ensure that victims have access to effective remedies, such as administrative processes.

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## Why are so many flights being cancelled?

Flight cancellations and airport delays are expected to continue over the next few months, and could affect summer holiday plans. Thousands of passengers were left abroad, without any possibilities to fly back home, especially over the Queen Elizabeth Jubilee weekend.

One of the main issues is staff shortages, although the government and industry disagree about who is to blame for the problem.

Covid restrictions in the UK and across the globe were hugely challenging for the travel industry. “Airlines UK”, the industry body for airlines registered here, said airlines have cut about 30,000 jobs since the start of the pandemic, having previously employed 74,000 people in 2019.

Thousands of jobs were also cut from airports and aviation support activities, which used to employ another 66,000 people. In June 2020, for example, Swissport, which had about 8,500 staff at UK airports (including baggage handlers and security personnel) announced it would halve its workforce.

Unions have also said that many previous airport staff who were laid off after the start of the pandemic have since taken jobs in other sectors.

The Office for National Statistics said that there were a record 1,295,000 job vacancies in the UK between February and April 2022.

Ryanair boss Michael O’Leary also pointed out that Brexit has made it harder for the industry to bring in European workers to fill gaps.



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## Platinum Jubilee: Who will be with the Queen on the balcony?

From royal wedding kisses to celebrations at the end of wars, the balcony at Buckingham Palace in London has been the stage for national moments since Queen Victoria first stepped out there in 1851.

For the Platinum Jubilee, the balcony will once again provide the photo for a big occasion, with Queen Elizabeth II and 17 other members of the Royal Family due to appear on Thursday. "There's been a lot of chat about who is going to be there and who is not," says Pauline Maclaran of the Centre for the Study of Modern Monarchy at Royal Holloway, University of London.

Only "working royals" and their children will appear, which excludes the Queen's son Prince Andrew, and her grandson Prince Harry, and his wife Meghan, the Duchess of Sussex.

There have been more than 40 people on the balcony on previous occasions, so limiting the numbers overall is also a deliberate choice. It sends a message about who are the most important players on the royal stage. It's not just a line up, but a line of succession.

There are suggestions the Queen could make a second balcony appearance on Sunday, putting the succession in tight focus, alongside her heir Prince Charles, her grandson Prince William and great-grandson Prince George. "It's all very symbolic. It shows the durability of the monarchy, even though it faces change," says Prof Maclaran.

The balcony is very much a royal space. Only two prime ministers have made it on to the balcony - Neville Chamberlain, after negotiating the Munich Agreement with Germany in 1938, and Sir Winston Churchill as crowds celebrated the end of war in Europe in 1945.

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## Ukraine: Putin urged to resume talks

The leaders of France and Germany had an 80-minute phone call with Russia's Vladimir Putin on Saturday, and urged him to start "direct, serious negotiations" with Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky.

Emmanuel Macron and Olaf Scholz "insisted on an immediate ceasefire and a withdrawal of Russian troops." Russia's president said Moscow was open to resuming dialogue with Kyiv, according to the Kremlin. It did not mention the possibility of direct Putin-Zelensky talks.

France and Germany also urged Mr Putin to release 2,500 Ukrainian fighters who were taken as prisoners of war at the Azovstal steelworks in Mariupol. Russia has previously said more than 900 of the fighters were moved to a reopened prison colony in Olenivka, a village in Russian-occupied Donetsk. A smaller number with serious wounds were taken to a hospital in the town of Novoazovsk, also in Donetsk region.

Also on Saturday, Russia decreased its age limit for professional soldiers, meaning people over 40 can enlist for the armed forces. Previously the army had age limits of 18-40 years for Russians and 18-30 for foreigners. President Putin has avoided large-scale conscription for what Russia calls its "special military operation" in Ukraine.

But in March Russia's defence ministry admitted that some conscripts were involved in the conflict and some had been taken prisoner by Ukrainian forces. The defence ministry stressed that it was not official policy to send conscripts into battle.

Ukrainian and Western military experts say Russia has suffered heavy losses in the war: about 30,000 killed, according to Ukraine, while the UK government estimates the toll at about 15,000. In comparison, Soviet losses in nine years of war in Afghanistan were about 15,000.

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## Ukraine situation - Dire warnings over grain blockage

United Nations (UN) Secretary General Antonio Guterres has warned that the war in Ukraine threatens to cause an unprecedented wave of hunger and destitution around the world.

Accessing Ukraine's stockpiled grain has become urgent internationally: millions of tonnes are exported annually to Africa and the Middle East. But it cannot be shipped now from Ukraine's Black Sea ports because of Russia's naval blockade.

Russia says Ukraine must de-mine waters off the Black Sea coast for corridors to export the grain to become operational. Ukraine fears it could lead to a naval invasion by Russian army.

The US affirms that Russia is trying to sell stolen Ukrainian wheat to countries in Africa, the New York Times reported.

In mid-May, the US sent an alert to 14 countries, mostly in Africa, that Russian cargo ships were leaving ports near Ukraine with the grain.

Russia is exporting grain from Ukraine via Crimea, Russian officials in occupied southern Ukraine say. But it is not clear how much is leaving the peninsula, which Russia annexed from Ukraine in 2014.

The claim - which the BBC has not been able to verify - comes from Ukrainian officials that accuse Russia of stealing about 600,000 tonnes of its grain and exporting some of it. Russia denies it is stealing grain.

Russia has held talks with Turkey, which is trying to assure safe maritime corridors in the Black Sea.



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## **UNICEF urges governments to keep schools safe, following deadly Texas shooting**

Governments must take greater action to ensure school remains a safe place for boys and girls, the head of the UN children's agency UNICEF said on Wednesday, following the latest deadly school shooting in the United States.

At least 19 children and two teachers were killed on Tuesday when 18-year-old gunman Salvador Ramos opened fire at Robb Elementary School in the small city of Uvalde, Texas, located near the border with Mexico.

Catherine Russell, UNICEF's Executive Director, said there have already been "horrific attacks" this year on schools in Afghanistan, Ukraine, the US, West Africa.

"Tragedy after tragedy, shooting after shooting, young life after young life: how many more children will die before government leaders act to keep children and their schools safe? Because until they do, these horrors will continue," she said in a statement.

Ms. Russell emphasized that outside of their homes, school is the one place where children should feel safest.

She noted that in addition to the lives lost, "many more children, teachers and school staff who witnessed the carnage will bear the emotional and psychological scars for the rest of their lives."

## ANSA<sup>en</sup> Latest News

### **Draghi reiterates call for gas-price cap**

It would hold back inflation and cut funds to Moscow, says Italian premier.

Premier Mario Draghi reiterated Italy's call for an EU-wide gas-price cap, amid soaring energy prices following Russia's invasion of Ukraine. This speech was done at the OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) meeting in Paris on Thursday.

"The European Council has approved the proposal to consider imposing a cap on the prices of Russian gas imports," Draghi said.

"This could limit the increase in inflation and reduce financial flows to Moscow". He added that "discussions are still taking place and the road could be long".

He also defended the Western sanction imposed on Moscow following the invasion.

"The G7 and the EU have shown considerable unity and solidarity in supporting Ukraine and in putting pressure on Russia to resume negotiations," he told during the meeting.

"The EU alone has approved six packages of sanctions that have landed a big blow to the oligarchs close to the Kremlin and key sectors of the Russian economy".

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## The Queen's unique style

Queen Elizabeth II is one of the most photographed women in history and over the past 70 years has defined what it means to dress like a queen.

She's become famous for her brightly coloured dresses with a matching hat, accessorised with her square handbag and a string of pearls. It sounds simple but the Queen's style has become a powerful formula.

It's a style that has been refined over seven decades, helped by the close relationships she has developed with trusted stylists and tailors.

The Queen has always had a very clear idea of what she wanted to look like, says historian Michael Pick. "People have said she has no idea about clothes, but that is simply not true. She is very astute about what suits her," Pick says.

When she was in her 20s, Princess Elizabeth began working with designer Norman Hartnell, a relationship she inherited from the Queen Mother. As she took on her new role as Queen, Hartnell helped her to shine through state banquets and royal tours.

Hartnell also created two of the most important dresses she would ever wear - her wedding dress and the dress she wore for her coronation. He describes the process as a collaboration. "For her coronation dress, Hartnell produced about eight designs and she chose elements from them all" Pick says.

For the last 24 years her outfits have been designed and produced in-house by a small team of around 10 people, led by her personal tailors Angela Kelly.

Before the pandemic the Queen was attending at 300 events a year. "It's a huge amount of work," Pick says. "You don't want the monarch wearing something someone else is wearing. The public expects something different."

## **Nasa’s “James Webb” Space Telescope hit by a space rock**

One of the large mirrors of the telescope was hit by a micro-meteoroid that was larger than expected and bigger than engineers were able to test on the ground, NASA space agency said.

Though assessments are still continuing, the telescope still appears to be operating well enough, and the collision had a “marginal effect in the data”, NASA said in its announcement.

The object hit one of the pieces of mirror that allow the telescope to work sometime between 23 and 25 May. NASA said that the telescope had been built to withstand such impacts, even if the piece of rock was larger than expected.

During the building process, researchers used a mix of simulations and actual impacts on pieces of mirror to see how the telescope would be able to withstand impacts with particles flying at very fast speeds across space.

“We always knew that Webb would have to resist into the space environment, which includes ultraviolet light and charged particles from the Sun, cosmic rays from exotic sources in the galaxy, and occasional strikes by micro-meteoroids within our solar system,” said Paul Geithner, technical project manager at NASA’s Goddard Space Flight Center.

“We designed and built Webb with performance margins (optical, thermal, electrical, mechanical) to ensure it can perform its ambitious science mission even after many years in space.”



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## **Virus testing: the “new normal”, as China continues the ‘zero-COVID’ strategy**

Thousands of COVID-19 testing sites have appeared across Beijing and other Chinese cities in the latest step of the country’s “zero-COVID” strategy.

Lines form every day: rain or shine, even when the spread of the virus has largely stopped. Some people need to go to work. Others want to shop. All are effectively compelled to get tested by a requirement to show a negative test result to enter office buildings, malls and other public places.

Regular testing of residents is becoming the new normal in many parts of China as the ruling Communist Party sticks to a “zero-COVID” approach, that is almost the opposite of what is happening in the rest of the world.

All residents in major cities must have a testing stations at a 15-minute walk distance. So, for example, Beijing and Shanghai have been ordered to open 10,000 of these stations each.

Many cities including Beijing are requiring a negative test result (done within the last three days) to enter a public place or take the bus or subway. The tests are free, with the result shown on the person’s smartphone, 12 hours later.

“This is something we should do,” said Beijing retiree Wang Shiyuan, who gets tested every three days in case he needs to go to the supermarket or take a bus. “Only when everyone obeys the requirements, we can reduce the risk of transmission.”