

First Crusade: 15,000 starving Christian soldiers march in religious procession around Jerusalem as its Muslim defenders look on

Portuguese navigator Vasco da Gama departs on his first voyage and becomes the first European to reach India by sea



Independent Vermont introduces a new constitution prohibiting slavery

Dr. Benjamin Waterhouse gives the first cowpox vaccination in the United States to his son to prevent smallpox

Fireworks made Washington world's most polluted city

AFP | Washington, United States

Washington was briefly the most polluted major city in the world, according to IQAir data, after a massive Independence Day fireworks show touted by the Trump administration as "awesome."

Pyrotechnico, the company hired by the White House's Freedom 250 organization, had set a goal of breaking a world record by launching 850,000 fireworks, though experts had warned that setting off so many in just 40 minutes could pose serious health risks.

Washington's pollution monitors began registering spikes around 8pm on Saturday, signaling local fireworks displays. But levels of fine particulate matter rose dramatically during the main show, leaving people watching downwind with an obscured view as smoke came billowing their way.



A fireworks display is seen during the "Salute to America" Independence Day celebration on the National Mall in Washington, DC

Fine particle pollution -- defined as smoke and particles 2.5 micrometers in diameter that can penetrate deep into the lungs, causing acute injury but also long-term disease -- peaked at over 200 micrograms per cubic meter at one monitoring site, city-collected data reviewed by AFP showed.

The Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) 24-hour standard caps exposure at 35 micrograms per cubic meter. "Code Purple" alerts, denoting air quality considered very

unhealthy for everyone, not just at-risk groups, blanketed much of the city as well as the wider region, including neighboring Virginia and Maryland.

And according to data compiled by Swiss company IQAir, which relies on a variety of public and private sources, Washington was the world's most polluted major city between around 3am to 5am on Sunday July 5. It is currently in 41st position, with Jakarta, Kinshasa and Addis Ababa occupying the first three spots.



This year's El Nino set to become record-breaker

EL NIÑO

A NATURAL CLIMATE PATTERN WITH GLOBAL IMPACTS

El Niño warms surface temperatures in the central and eastern equatorial Pacific Ocean, bringing worldwide changes in winds, pressure and rainfall patterns.

THE PATTERN
It typically takes place every two to seven years and lasts around nine to 12 months.

A DOUBLE-EDGED SWORD
It can lead to droughts in some parts of the world and flooding in others.

HOW EL NIÑO WORKS

Trade winds weaken, allowing warm water to move east toward South America. This disrupts normal ocean-atmosphere interactions.

WEAKER TRADE WINDS

WARM WATER MOVES EAST

COLD WATER SUPPRESSED

DID YOU KNOW?
El Niño is the warm phase of ENSO (El Niño-Southern Oscillation). The cool phase is La Niña.

Ocean temperature during strong El Niño events can be 1°C to 3°C above normal in the eastern equatorial Pacific.

GLOBAL IMPACTS

Impacts vary by region, but commonly include:

- DROUGHTS**
Reduced rainfall over parts of Australia, Indonesia, India, and the Americas.
- FLOODING**
Above-average rainfall in parts of South America, the southern U.S., and East Africa.
- EXTREME WEATHER**
Stronger storms and cyclones in some regions.
- IMPACT ON MARINE LIFE**
Warmer waters affect fisheries and coral ecosystems.
- AGRICULTURE & FOOD SECURITY**
Changes in yields and crop production due to altered rainfall and temperatures.

El Niño is a natural part of our climate system. Better understanding helps us prepare for a more resilient future.

AFP | Paris, France

The current El Niño weather phenomenon is expected to break records for its overall strength, a top expert said Tuesday, as regions face the risk of droughts, floods and other extremes linked to the event.

This year's El Niño is unlike anything seen in more than three decades of tracking the phenomenon, with forecast

models pointing to an "extreme" event, said Tim Stockdale, an El Niño expert at the European Centre for Medium-Range Weather Forecasts (ECMWF), an intergovernmental organization.

"I think it's absolutely true to say we've never had a forecast of an El Niño that was so strong and so consistent across (forecast) models," he said in a media briefing.

Stockdale said it would be "a very, very big surprise"

if the event failed to be a record-breaker.

"I would expect it to break records," he said, while cautioning: "but no guarantees."

While El Niño usually peaks between November and February, the resulting spike in temperatures typically comes later.

Combined with human-induced climate change, the last El Niño contributed to making 2023 the second-hottest year on record and 2024 the all-time high.

France to give Syria 50 mn euros stolen by Assad uncle

AFP | Damascus, Syria

French President Emmanuel Macron said yesterday on a visit to Syria that Paris will return more than 50 million euros (\$57 million) stolen by the family of former ruler Bashar al-Assad to the country.

The two countries signed several agreements focusing on development and reconstruction after more than a decade of civil war.

France had confiscated the money from Rifaat al-Assad, the ousted leader's uncle.

Macron told a joint press

conference with Syrian counterpart Ahmed al-Sharaa that "more than 50 million euros from the seizure of ill-gotten gains by the family of the former dictator... will be returned to the Syrian people to finance concrete development projects in the territory".

South Korean law targeting false online information takes effect

AFP | Seoul, South Korea

South Korea began enforcing Tuesday a revised law targeting false information posted online, toughening penalties for repeat offenders despite concerns over the impact on free speech.

The law, which requires major platforms to set up new response systems, comes as concern grows in the country over digital misinformation, including high-profile cases involving celebrities.

But opposition politicians,

civic groups and media experts warn it could chill free speech and open the door to government-influenced censorship.

Now users who intentionally spread illegal false or manipulated information could be ordered to pay up to five times the actual cost of damages.

And repeat offenders whose content has been ruled illegal by courts face fines of up to one billion won (\$655,000).



A security personnel along with a sniffer dog inspects near the Four Seasons Hotel following two blasts, in Damascus

Bomb attacks wound 18 in Damascus as Macron visits

AFP | Damascus, Syria

Two explosions shook Damascus on Tuesday near a hotel where French President Emmanuel Macron was staying, wounding at least 18 people, during the French leader's landmark visit to Syria.

The president was not inside the hotel when the blasts hit, having already left for Syria's presidential palace, where an AFP team saw him arrive for a meeting with counterpart Ahmed al-Sharaa.

AFP journalists heard at least one blast echo through Damascus before seeing a plume of smoke rising near the Four Seasons Hotel, with security forces closing a road and ambulances rushing to the scene.

Syria's interior ministry said one bomb had been placed inside a car parked on the side of a road, while the second was planted in a garbage container.

It said they exploded "while preparations were

underway" to dismantle them.

The blasts wounded 18 people, including four police officers, Syrian state media said.

The French president, the first Western European leader to visit Syria since the fall of longtime ruler Bashar al-Assad in 2024, would continue his trip, France's Elysee Palace said.

"I saw three traffic police officers injured on the ground, before the area was evacuated and the roads leading to it were closed," Hamam Hammoud, a 37-year-old employee at a money exchange company, told AFP.

The blasts came moments before Syrian state television announced Macron's arrival at the palace.

Macron is meeting with Sharaa to discuss post-war reconstruction of Syria and reiterate his call for "unity" and "plurality", having also met with civil society representatives.

It said they exploded "while preparations were

Macron says Syria must not be destabilised

Damascus, Syria

French President Emmanuel Macron warned on Tuesday that Syria must not be destabilised after twin bomb attacks near the Damascus hotel where he spent the night, during a landmark state visit to a country emerging from years of civil war.

In a joint press conference with his Syrian counterpart, Macron said we

must "not let ourselves be destabilised" by such attacks, before which he had already left for the presidential palace in the heart of the Syrian capital, and reiterated Paris' support for the country.

Sharaa saluted Macron's "courage" for carrying on with his visit despite the bombings.

Syrian President Ahmed al-Sharaa (L) welcomes France's President Emmanuel Macron for a joint press conference in Damascus



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TWEETS

01

It is an honor to be able to speak before the Indonesian Parliament. India and Indonesia are connected by history, culture, and people-to-people relations that have been established for centuries.
@narendramodi

02

The warnings about AI are real - and so is the potential. If used well, and shared widely, it could become the great equalizer of the 21st Century. The choice before us is not between faith in AI and fear of it. It is between governing by design & drifting by default.
@antonioгутerres

03

FREEDOM FUEL HAS ARRIVED. THE FIRST Freedom Fuel Network gas station has LANDED in Philadelphia, lowering the price at the pump to \$3.47 for our 47th President. President Trump is leading the charge to lower gas prices this summer - putting more money in your pocket.
@WhiteHouse

04

Nothing can smother the aspiration of Syrian women and men to live in a fully sovereign, safe, pluralistic, and united Syria. This morning I met Syria in all its diversity. I saw dignity, courage, and determination. My visit continues.
@EmmanuelMacron

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