

Kenyan confirmed dead in demo over US Ebola centre: rights group

AFP | Nanyuki, Kenya

A Kenyan protester shot in the head during violent protests over an Ebola quarantine centre for US citizens has been confirmed dead, a human rights group told AFP yesterday.

The centre at Laikipia Air Base in the town of Nanyuki, under the shadow of Mount Kenya, is designed to quarantine Americans arriving from the neighbouring Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), which is battling a major Ebola outbreak.

Kenya has never recorded a case of Ebola and many oppose the idea of bringing potential carriers of the highly contagious disease into the country.

There were running battles around Nanyuki on Tuesday, with protesters lighting fires and throwing stones at police, who responded with teargas and water cannons, AFP journalists saw.

Gunshots were heard and AFP saw one man lying motionless after being shot in the head. The Red Cross said another person was injured by a teargas cannister.

"His death is confirmed. We are waiting for his family," Hussein Khalid, director of the NGO Vocal Africa, said of the victim.

Dozens were arrested, including by armed police in plain clothes, AFP saw.



A protester reacts while being arrested by a plainclothes Kenyan police officer during a demonstration against a controversial US-built Ebola quarantine centre slated to begin operations at Laikipia Air Base in Nanyuki

COP31 host unveils 'electrification' priority for climate talks

Around one-third of the world's electricity is still produced using coal

● The target is voluntary and does not require the approval of the nearly 200 nations that take decisions by consensus.

AFP | Bonn, Germany

COP31 host Turkey urged countries yesterday to join a voluntary push to make electricity account for 35% of global energy demand by 2035 as it announced its priorities for the UN climate talks.

The November summit in Antalya is taking shape as the Middle East conflict roils global energy markets, exposing fossil fuel importers to price spikes and supply shortages.

Boosting electrification could help insulate economies from fossil fuel price shocks and was "one of the key priorities" for COP31, incoming summit president Murat Kurum told delegates in Bonn.

Thousands of climate negotiators are gathering in the German city this week and next to lay the groundwork for the final decisions to be taken by political leaders at the summit due to



start November 9.

Turkey said raising the global share of energy demand met by electricity from around 20% to 35% by 2035 would speed up the shift from fossil fuels to renewable power.

Kurum said COP31 organisers would "work to build a strong global coalition for this goal" in the months ahead.

The target is voluntary and does not require the approval of the nearly 200 nations that take decisions by consensus during the hard-fought UN-sponsored climate summits.

Every year, countries are encouraged by COP hosts to sup-

port non-binding pledges on a parallel "action agenda" that is separate to the formal negotiations.

Australia, which is steering the formal negotiations in a COP31 co-hosting arrangement with Turkey, said electrification could cut emissions and shore up energy security.

"I see them as different sides of the same coin. Electrification reduces the need for fossil fuels," COP31 negotiations chief Chris Bowen, who is also Australia's climate and energy minister, told AFP in an interview in Bonn on Monday.

On Tuesday, Bowen said he

would "take inspiration" from Turkey's action agenda -- which also includes initiatives to reduce planet-warming methane emissions from waste -- into the negotiations.

'Deep contradiction'

In simple terms, electrification means replacing technologies that burn fossil fuels directly -- such as gas heating systems and diesel vehicles -- with electric alternatives.

But for electrification to drive down heat-trapping emissions and tackle climate change, the extra electricity must come primarily from clean sources like solar and wind.



Around one-third of the world's electricity is still produced using coal, one of the most polluting sources of energy.

Woolly mammoth among trove of ancient DNA found in squirrel poo

AFP | Paris, France

A huge treasure trove of ancient DNA from animals including extinct woolly mammoths has been discovered in frozen squirrel faeces in Canada's remote Yukon territory, scientists said.



terday.

The DNA found deep inside sealed-off burrows is between 3,000 and 700,000 years old, offering a rare window into how life has changed over the millennia.

As well as a DNA from woolly mammoths -- which the US company Colos-

sal claims it is trying to "de-extinct" -- genetic material was also found from wolves, bison, horses, a cheetah and hundreds of plants.

Tyler Murchie, a paleogenomics researcher at Canada's McMaster University and lead author of a new study, admitted that digging through squirrel poop might sound "less appealing" than discovering, say, a mammoth tusk.

However the "spectacular" amount of information they uncovered suggests that faeces is an overlooked way to see

into our planet's distant past, he added.

The scientists had just been expecting to study the squirrel's microbiome before coming across the "really surprising biodiversity of organisms", Murchie said.

It turned out that arctic ground squirrels were ideal subjects for this research because of their "natural archivist behaviour", he explained.

The squirrels are only conscious for around four months a year, spending the rest of their life in hibernation.

Killing the mood: smartphones reduce birth rate, studies say

● China's communist government abandoned its decades-long one-child policy in 2016

AFP | Washington, United States

As governments around the world struggle with ways to reverse plunging birth rates, new US studies suggest they have ignored a key culprit -- the smartphone.

"Is the iPhone Birth Control?" asked a paper published Monday by the National Bureau of Economic Research, delving into why US fertility rates have fallen by 22 percent since 2007.

For a while, experts linked the decline to the recession that struck in 2008 when the global financial system nearly imploded, driving millions of people into hardship. But when the



economy picked up, a rebound in births never came.

Myriad other reasons have been posited, such as increased use of contraception, more female education, and growing housing or childcare costs. However, no clear cause has been established.

So Middlebury College economist Caitlin Myers and her

student Ezekiel Hooper tested a hypothesis that smartphones -- which emerged with the arrival of the first iPhone in 2007 -- might have something to do with it.

Until 2011, iPhones were available from a single US cellular network, AT&T, so they compared US counties that had near-universal AT&T coverage

with those that had little or none during those years.

And they found that access to the iPhone correlated with reductions in births by 4.5-8.0 percent at ages 15-19 and by 3.2-6.6 percent at ages 20-24.

There were also statistically significant but smaller declines among older women.

While they stress that iPhones are not the "sole cause," the introduction of the smartphone "played a sizable role in the decline in US births" after 2007 as it shaped people's behavior with less in-person contact.

"As modern smartphones diffused, time spent with friends in person and sexual activity fell sharply alongside rising consumption of pornography, a possible substitute for partnered sex," they concluded.

'Technology shock'

Another study published in May by University of Cincin-

nati economists Nathan Hudson and Hernan Moscoso Boedo found evidence of similar trends and on a global scale since 2007.

They analyzed World Bank data measuring smartphone penetration and teenage fertility rates in 128 countries.

They found that the decline in birth rates accelerated once smartphones became widely available -- a phenomenon found across countries "with fundamentally different healthcare, welfare, economic, and cultural environments."

This, they concluded, points to "a common global technology shock."

Some academics remain skeptical. For example, teenage births in the United States have been falling since the early 1990s, long before the dawn of the smartphone.

Neither study examines how governments might utilize their

findings.

Both rich and poorer countries are grappling with declining birth rates which lead to aging societies and a shrinking workforce -- putting strain on social security systems and potentially dampening economic growth and productivity.

The Centers for Disease Control says US fertility rates are at an all-time low, while leading Asian economies all face the prospect of shrinking populations in the coming years.

China's communist government abandoned its decades-long one-child policy in 2016, while Japan and South Korea have invested heavily in pro-natal policies with little impact.

The world's poorest countries, such as in sub-Saharan Africa, often still have high birth rates, but middle-income countries like India and Brazil also face a fast-dropping fertility rates.

Nintendo to remake classic 'Zelda' game 'Ocarina of Time'



Paris, France

Japanese games giant Nintendo on Tuesday announced a new version of beloved 1998 action-adventure classic "The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time" for its latest Switch 2 console.

The company provided few details about the "Ocarina of Time" remake on a livestream presenting upcoming titles, saying only that the game will arrive this year, the 40th anniversary of the series.

Its original version on the Nintendo 64 console was a 1990s landmark, with an immersive, detailed 3D world and a combat system that allowed players to "lock on" to individual enemies -- today an industry standard.

Players controlled green-clad protagonist Link in a time-hopping adventure that straddled both his childhood and adulthood, as he confronted dark lord Ganondorf to save Princess Zelda.

"Ocarina of Time" is regularly celebrated as one of the best games of all time in the gaming press, and has a 99 percent score on review aggregation site Metacritic.

A previous 2011 remake for Nintendo's 3DS handheld updated the original's graphics to take advantage of the machine's 3D capabilities.

More than 140 million "Zelda" games have been sold worldwide, with the last instalment, 2023's "Tears of the Kingdom", becoming the fastest-selling yet.

A live-action "Zelda" movie is planned for release in April 2027.