

# Protests against German car industry rev up in Frankfurt

The exhibition, a staple of the global automotive calendar, has been the target of protests by environmentalist groups like Greenpeace and Sand in the Works because of the contribution Germany's vast car industry makes to climate change

● Activists were present at car launches, standing on parked cars within the exhibition centre holding Climate Killer posters within the sight of Merkel and of car bosses

AFP | Frankfurt am Main

Environmental campaigners plan to disrupt the Frankfurt motor show this weekend as Germany's car industry comes under increasing pressure to go green and abandon internal combustion engines.

"The car industry has cheated on diesel and is contributing to the worsening climate crisis," said Gerald Neubauer, a spokesman for the campaign group Campact, which is co-organising a demonstration yesterday at Frankfurt's biennial International Motor Show (IAA).

Police say thousands of demonstrators are expected to walk or cycle to Frankfurt's Exhibition Centre and activists want to disrupt the car show by blocking the surrounding streets on Sunday.

"We want a revolution in modes of transport," said a spokeswoman for the climate action group Sand in the Gearbox.

The combination of protests and civil disobedience aimed at Germany's car industry shows the sector no longer enjoys the untouchable status it once held as a key driver in Europe's biggest economy.

Diesel-fuelled cars have remained at low levels of popularity in Germany following Volkswagen's massive "dieselgate" emissions cheating scandal of 2015.

The 10-day long IAA show,



A Greenpeace activist protested at the Frankfurt motor show earlier this week by standing on top of a SUV on display with a poster that read 'Climate Killers'

where the latest automobile trends are being showcased until September 22, is crystallising tensions over the car industry in Germany, where climate change is shaking up the public discourse.

## 'Climate killers'

There are already calls to ban gas-guzzling SUVs from German city centres after four pedestrians, including a three-year-old boy, were killed this month when one mounted the pavement in Berlin.

"Such tank-like cars do not belong in cities," tweeted Stephan von Dassel, a Greens politician

and mayor of Berlin's Mitte district, where the fatal accident happened.

"They are 'climate killers', even without accidents -- every driving error becomes a life-threatening danger for innocent (pedestrians)."

When the Frankfurt car show opened to the press on Tuesday, Greenpeace activists inflated a giant black balloon outside, bearing the inscription CO<sub>2</sub>.

Then on Thursday at the Volkswagen and BMW stands, protesters climbed on SUVs with signs bearing the slogan "Climate Killers" during a visit by German Chancellor Angela

Merkel.

"The automotive industry has still not understood the climate crisis," Greenpeace activist Benjamin Stephan told AFP.

"Instead of celebrating fuel-guzzling SUVs, manufacturers must put an end to these urban tanks and shut down combustion engines."

Manufacturers must "get out of petrol and diesel, get out of the combustion engine and reduce the number of cars", added Campact's Neubauer.

The vision for many environmental activists is seeing German cities free of cars.

## 'Under pressure'

"The IAA is a symbolic place, where politicians meet carmakers to congratulate themselves" on an outdated mode of transport, said the Sand in the Gearbox spokeswoman, using the pseudonym Tina "Velo" - bike in French.

"We have to abandon cars, we want car-free cities."

Sand in the Gearbox is representative of a more radical faction of Germany's environmental movement which is prepared to engage in civil disobedience to attract attention.



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Movements such as the Extinction Rebellion network, which use non-violent resistance to protest climate change, are spreading across Europe.

In Germany, the similar group Ende Gelände succeeded in occupying and temporarily shutting down a large brown coal mine in June, which has galvanised the anti-car movement.

"The automotive industry is under pressure -- it no longer has the support of society as it did a few years ago, because it has missed out on developments and has no concepts for the future," added Tina Velo.

Having long been regarded as an essential cog in Europe's biggest economy, Germany's auto industry has reached a crossroads as it struggles to adapt to the trend of electric cars.

On Thursday, Merkel said she would support the sector through "revolutions" in climate protection and digitalisation, but warned firms must develop new technologies and win back lost trust among the public.

## Apple, Facebook, Amazon, Google emails demanded in US House panel probe

Reuters | Washington

A US House of Representatives panel on Friday demanded internal emails, detailed financial information and other company records from top executives of Amazon.com Inc., Facebook Inc, Apple Inc, and Alphabet Inc's Google, widening the antitrust probe of Big Tech.

The letters seek by Oct. 14 internal emails over the last decade from Apple CEO Tim Cook, Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos, Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg and Alphabet CEO Larry Page, among others, about acquisitions.

Apple shares fell about 1.8 per cent after the market



The logos of Amazon, Apple, Facebook and Google in a combination photo

opened. While Apple had been mentioned as a potential target, the House letter offered the first concrete evidence of a wide-ranging antitrust investigation.

Apple has faced criticism that its App Store's policies and algorithms support its own products and stifle third-party applications.

## EU finance ministers eye simpler fiscal rules

Reuters | Helsinki

European Union finance ministers were holding a first discussion yesterday about how to simplify the EU's complex fiscal rules to help make public finances more sustainable and stabilise economies throughout business cycles.

Originally designed in 1997, the EU rules, called the Stability and Growth Pact, put limits on borrowing in the economic union of countries that share the euro currency, but left members sovereign over government debt and deficits.

After modifications in 2005, 2011 and 2013, the rules have become so complex that the European Commission, which is the guardian of EU laws, each year publishes an almost 100-page handbook to explain how they work, along with many exemp-



European Commission Vice-President Valdis Dombrovskis holds a news conference at the EU Commission headquarters in Brussels, Belgium

tions and exceptions.

The two key elements of the rules are a limit on the nominal budget deficit of 3% of GDP and a ceiling on public debt of 60%.

"When we talk about simplifi-

cation, it does not mean revising the key fiscal targets, just how they are measured and what parameters we use," European Commission vice president Valdis Dombrovskis told report-

ers on entering the talks.

"We now heavily use directly unobservable parameters like the output gap, or structural balance, so the discussion is if we should use more directly observable parameters like nominal debt and expenditure increases," he said.

Officials said, however, that changing the rules could take more than a year of discussions and legal process that would be driven by the new European Commission starting on Nov 1. Dombrovskis will retain his post in the new EU executive.

The ministerial discussion at the informal talks in Helsinki will be based on a report by the independent European Fiscal Board (EFB), requested by the Commission, which argues the elaborate rules should be boiled down to a medium-term cap on public debt.