

Smog returns as Spring Festival ends

Many cities in northern China will face a smoggy weekend due to the windless weather, while smoke from firecrackers will worsen pollution in some areas, the national environmental authority said.

Air quality will start to decline on Thursday in many northern regions and reach a low on Friday, especially in the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region, the Ministry of Environmental Protection said.

Other regions, including in the south and northeast, will also be blanketed by smog, which is forecast to fall to light and moderate levels on Friday, the ministry added.

After Sunday, affected regions will embrace blue skies, though some cities will see pollution lingering due to firecrackers, the National Environmental Monitoring Center said.

Setting off firecrackers, a traditional way to celebrate the Lunar New Year, can cause air pollution to suddenly worsen.

As of 6 pm on Jan 27, Lunar New Year's Eve, only 19 of the 338 cities with regular air quality monitoring had hazardous levels of pollution. However, at 2 am on Saturday, after firecrackers had been set off that night, 183 cities had hazardous air pollution, among which 62 saw the air quality index reach its upper limit, the ministry said.

Air quality in the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region and neighboring provinces was more severely affected by fireworks, the ministry said.

For example, Beijing saw the concentration of PM2.5 – fine particulate matter with a diameter less than 2.5 microns that is harmful to health – soar from 97 micrograms per cubic meter at 7 pm on Friday to 647 at 2 am on Saturday, dragging air quality to the most hazardous level within seven hours, said Li Yunting, head of air quality monitoring at the Beijing Environmental Monitoring Center.

Cities that banned fireworks found the move effective in controlling pollution, the ministry said.

For example, the average PM2.5 reading during the same period in Shanghai was 17, the ministry's data showed.

In addition to fireworks, coal consumption for heating and industrial production were still major sources of pollution during the holiday, the ministry said.

Wang Shuxiao, an environmental professor at Peking University, said while small plants suspended production during the holiday, emissions from large plants continued, making them a major source of pollution.

World must ensure youth engagement at all levels, including in design of national plans, UN Forum hears

2 February 2017 – Opening amid backlash against globalization and a marked shift towards marginalization in some parts of the world, a United Nations forum heard an outpouring of optimism and strong belief in collective action by youths and UN Member States for people, planet, peace and shared prosperity.

“Young people are stepping up to engage with the 2030 Agenda [for Sustainable Development], support its implementation, advocate for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and hold their Governments accountable,” said a Statement issued by the President of the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), Frederick Musiiwa Makamure Shava, wrapping up the 2017 Youth Forum.

The Statement noted that the 6th annual Forum, held on 30 and 31 January at UN Headquarters in New York, had opened against the backdrop of a backlash against globalization, increasing inequality and a marked shift towards nationalism and isolation in many parts of the world. Nevertheless, the event witnessed an outpouring of optimism and strong belief in collective action by young people and UN Member States.

One of the key messages that came out of the event was the need to ensure youth inclusion and engagement at all levels and in all processes that affect them, including in the design of national plans.

“Young people’s participation should be institutionalized through national Youth Advisory Councils and other mechanisms,” the Presidential Statement said.

The Forum also spotlighted the importance of prioritizing the creation of decent jobs for youth in a changing labour market, including “green” jobs and opportunities in agriculture and industrial development, with special attention to youth in the rural economy and fragile situations.

At the closing of the Forum on Tuesday, Mr. ECOSOC President Shava told youth participants that “you emphasized investment in your education, skills development, including on entrepreneurship, stressing that this should be of high quality and linked to the job market opportunities.”

He called on all countries that will participate in the upcoming high-level political forum to use these messages in their national presentations.

Heavy fighting in eastern Ukraine extracting heavy civilian toll, UN Security Council hears

2 February 2017 – Briefing the Security Council on the situation in eastern Ukraine, the top United Nations political and humanitarian officials underlined today that continuing fighting in the region, with only short periods of respite, have exasperated human suffering.

“Since 7 January this year, and in particular over the last few days, we have seen a dangerous intensification of the conflict,” Jeffrey Feltman, the UN Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs told Council members today.

“The entire length of the ‘Contact Line’ has seen a serious escalation of hostilities, and there is still a risk of further deterioration of the situation,” added Mr. Feltman.

According to reports, there were more than 10,000 explosions in the Donetsk region over 24 hours, and heavy fighting has been reported near Mariupol, Popasna and the Svitlodarsk/Debaltseve areas, both in Government-controlled and non-government controlled areas, along with use of heavy weapons such as multiple-launch-rocket systems which are prohibited by the Minsk Agreements.

Furthermore, the UN Human Rights Monitoring Mission has recorded damage to civilian houses and a school in populated areas of Avdiivka, raising serious concerns about possible violations of international humanitarian law by all sides.

Since the start of the conflict, almost 10,000 people have been killed (Ukrainian armed forces, civilians and members of armed groups), and over 23,000. Over 2,000 of those killed were civilians.

VIDEO: Secretary-General Guterres expressed “deep concern” over recent intensification of conflict in eastern Ukraine – UN political affairs chief, Jeffrey Feltman, told the Security Council meeting earlier today.

Mr. Feltman also spoke of the statement agreed yesterday at the meeting of the Trilateral Contact Group in Minsk which laid down urgent measures that both sides should take not only in the Avdiivka-Yasynuvata-Donetsk airport area, but along the entire contact line in order to prevent further ceasefire violations that could in turn spiral out of control.

“This is a positive development, but the test will be in the implementation of the measures,” he said noting that the pattern of successive ceasefire

agreements broken by fresh violence left civilians caught in the crossfire and trapped in suffering.

“With every new day of fighting, the conflict becomes more entrenched and difficult to resolve. There is no military solution to this conflict,” he said.

Also briefing the Security Council today, UN Emergency Relief Coordinator Stephen O’Brien highlighted the impact of the conflict to civilians underlined the need for a political solution to the crisis.

“Civilians living on both sides of the frontline [...] are not only traumatized, living a precarious and dangerous existence, but damage to critical services is making survival an issue,” said Mr. O’Brien, adding that damage to critical infrastructure such heating in places such as Avdiivka and the freezing temperatures could trigger large-scale displacement.

VIDEO: UN Emergency Relief Coordinator, Stephen O’Brien, depicted a grave humanitarian situation in Ukraine, while re-emphasising the need for unhindered humanitarian access for the vulnerable population.

The latest escalation of violence is exasperating the ongoing needs of an estimated 3.8 million civilians who require various degrees of humanitarian assistance. More than 60 per cent of those (about 2.3 million people) reside in non-Government controlled areas, and over 70 per cent are elderly, children and women.

Further, noting that the while some humanitarian response efforts continue, undue bureaucratic restrictions which have been imposed since July 2015 by the de facto authorities in Donetsk and Luhansk regions have severely affecting humanitarian access.

He also reported that, Government-imposed bureaucratic impediments, particularly in relation to the ban on commercial trade and importation of food and medicines across the ‘contact line,’ remained a serious constraint to alleviating the humanitarian crisis and that suspension of social payments by the Government have severely affected hundreds of thousands of displaced people.

In his briefing, Mr. O’Brien also alerted the Security Council of the risk of serious environmental impact of the hostilities, he said:

“Damage to the Phenol plant near Novgorodske village means that waste chemicals, including deadly sulfuric acid and formaldehyde, are now at critical levels [and] leakage into the surrounding land and the Seversky Donets River would have disastrous humanitarian consequences in a highly industrialized part of Europe.”

Marching towards peace, FARC-EP begins turning in arms – UN Mission in Colombia

2 February 2017 – More than 200 men and women of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia-People's Army (FARC-EP) marched today to demobilization camps, two months after a peace deal that ended the Western Hemisphere's longest running conflict, United Nations monitors coordinating the process reported.

The UN Mission in Colombia reported that the Transitional Point of Normalization of Pandores, department of La Guajira, in northern Colombia, according to figures from tripartite Monitoring and Verification Mechanism, composed of the Government, the FARC-EP and coordinated by the UN Mission.

Members of the FARC-EP – some of them pregnant or breastfeeding – walked about nine kilometres from four pre-grouping points near to the Pandores transitional point, where the FARC-EP camp will be located and where the separation of forces will take place, a task which the UN Mission will verify.

"As a UN Mission, this moment is crucial because it means we will continue to verify the ceasefire and cessation of hostilities through our participation in the Tripartite Mechanism, and we will be able to begin the operational part of the verification of the laying down of arms," explained the Deputy Head of Observers of the Mission, José Mauricio Villacorta.

According to the Mission, the women and men marching today join more than 6,300 FARC-EP members who began mobilizing on Saturday, 28 January, to zones and points using 36 travel routes in 14 departments of the country, according to preliminary figures from the Colombian Government's High Commissioner for Peace, on one of the country's largest logistics operations.

FARC-EP members were received today at the Pandores site by High Commissioner for Peace Sergio Jaramillo, FARC-EP leader Ivan Márquez, Colombian authorities and Mr. Mauricio Villacorta, in a symbolic act to highlight the parties' commitment and the imminent start of the laying down of arms, which the UN Mission will verify, to enable the transition to civilian life.

"This shows that we are bringing the agreement to reality," said Mr. Jaramillo, who added: "This is a moment of joy."

Iván Márquez, who headed the FARC-EP negotiating team in Havana, Cuba, where four years of negotiations on the eventual peace accord took place, stated: "Something good is happening in Colombia: it's peace [...] This peace is irrepressible, unstoppable; let us go forward."

"To date, we have focused on the planning and preparation phase so that the

Mission can carry out the tasks of registering and storing weapons,” said Mr. Mauricio Villacorta.

Once FARC-EP members are in the camps the first step for the laying down of arms is the registration of arms and weapons. Unstable armaments – such as gunpowder, grenades and anti-personnel mines – will be destroyed in site. After 180 days, the UN Mission in Colombia is set to remove all the weapons from the camp.

In early October 2016, Colombian voters narrowly rejected the historic peace accord between the Government and the FARC-EP. That deal led to a cessation of hostilities and agreements on key issues such as political participation, land rights, illicit drugs and victims’ rights and transitional justice. The two sides signed a new agreement in late November.

[Days of ISIL are numbered, says UN envoy as nation prepares for unified Iraq](#)

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2 February 2017 –

The military campaign to oust Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Da’esh) terrorists from Iraq is nearly won, the humanitarian crisis is expected to continue for months, if not years, the United Nations top official for the country said today.

“Three months after the Mosul military operation started, combat operations in the eastern part of Mosul have come to an end,” the Secretary-General’s Special Representative for Iraq, Ján Kubiš, told the UN Security Council during a briefing.

He said that the Iraqi forces, with significant support from its international partners, especially the United States, will remain engaged in complex urban operations, in particular inside the old city in western Mosul.

“Yet, in the rather short foreseeable future, the liberation operations in Iraq are coming to an end – the days of the so-called ISIL in Iraq are counted,” added Mr. Kubiš, who is also the head of the UN Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI).

According to an advance summary of the 2017 Humanitarian Response Plan submitted by relief aid partners in December, at least \$985 million is required this year to reach the 5.8 million most vulnerable Iraqis. Of this,

\$331 million is being sought specifically for the Mosul response.

Already a lot is being done. Over 1.4 million displaced Iraqis have returned to their homes, including one million in the past 12 months.



Ján Kubiš, Special Representative for Iraq and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI), addresses the Security Council meeting on the situation concerning Iraq. UN Photo/Eskinder Debebe

In the post-Da'esh period, Iraq will need continuous, substantial and sustainable support and assistance from the international community, including its regional partners, he stressed, warning that any abrupt scaling-down of engagement or support would mean repeating mistakes of the past – mistakes that have had grave consequences for stability and security, well beyond the borders of Iraq, even globally.

The protection of civilians, the avoidance of steps that could incite sectarian tensions, and the prevention of looting and revenge attacks in Mosul and other liberated areas of the country “constitute first steps in the process of national and community-based reconciliation, in building a new and truly unified Iraq,” he said.

Since 2003, Iraq has lost more than half of its ethnic and religious minority population. Special attention should therefore be paid to arrangements that address the specific security and other concerns of minorities to enable returns to their homes.

The National Alliance Initiative, submitted to UNAMI by the largest parliamentarian bloc, on the way forward in post-Da'esh Iraq is a good starting point in the Iraqi-owned and led, but UN-facilitated, process of national settlement and reconciliation, he said.

UNAMI is currently working with various groups, including the Sunni and Turkmen components, Kurdistan region of Iraq, civil society, minority communities, tribal leaders, and youth and women groups with the aim of soliciting their views and vision on how to build a post-ISIL united Iraq, based on the principles of equality and citizenship.

He emphasized that “for national reconciliation to succeed, it must be supported by grassroots initiatives.”

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