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Social Global Economy

UN agency says poorer countries hit by slow global economic growth

Geneva, Oct. 29, (dpa/GNA) – A UN trade body sees global growth at 2.7% for this year and next, down from an average 3% in the period 2001 to 2019.

This would hit poorer countries hard, UNCTAD, the UN organization that focuses on the trade of developing countries, said in Geneva on Tuesday.

Countries with resources needed for the green transition could benefit from global trade, it said. These include rare earths, cobalt, lithium and nickel.

But new ways of thinking were needed to help poorer countries at a time of low growth, high debt, lacking investment and growing protectionism in richer countries, UNCTAD said.

The organization is placing hopes on a proposed UN convention on global tax collaboration to counter tax evasion and illegal financial flows and release money for development.

In addition, the UN trade body said that a global security network is needed for indebted poor countries to make liquidity available without the austerity imposed as a rule by the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

UNCTAD noted a definite decline in growth in low-income countries to 4.1% on average from an average annual figure of 6.6% between 2003 and 2013.

A large part of this was due to China, which is seen by the UN as a developing country, implying that the situation for many poor countries was even worse, UNCTAD said.

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Social Hezbollah Qassem

Hezbollah elects Naim Qassem as head after death of Hassan Nasrallah

Beirut, Oct. 29, (dpa/GNA) - The pro-Iranian Lebanese Shiite militia Hezbollah said on Tuesday they had chosen deputy chief Naim Qassem to lead the group, four weeks after the killing of the previous secretary general, Hassan Nasrallah.

Since Nasrallah's death, Qassem has given several speeches that were broadcast on television. It is unclear where he is currently.

Hezbollah's Shura Council elected Qassem to the post in accordance with the "recognized procedure for the election of the general secretary," the Shiite militia announced. Qassem is now leading Hezbollah and the Islamic Resistance on a "noble mission." The militia announced that it would continue to pursue its previous goals under the new leader "until victory is achieved."

Israel's army killed Nasrallah in an airstrike on a southern suburb of Beirut at the end of September. Since then, Hashem Safieddine, the head of Hezbollah's Executive Council, has been considered a possible successor.

Last week, however, the militia confirmed that he had been killed weeks earlier in an attack on the headquarters of the Hezbollah secret service near Beirut, as reported by the Israeli military.

An influential figure within Hezbollah for decades

Qassem was born in a village near Nabatiyeh in southern Lebanon and is about 70 years old.

He is one of the members who founded Hezbollah in the early 1980s to fight against the Israeli occupation of Lebanon. Since 1991, he has been deputy head and thus one of the most influential figures within the organization alongside Nasrallah.

Like Nasrallah, Qassem is a cleric of Shia Islam, but he also studied chemistry and French in Lebanon. He is said to have a strong influence on Hezbollah's external image in the media.

In 2004 he published a book about the history of the organization, which also contains autobiographical parts. Qassem is married and has six children.

Israel has massively expanded its airstrikes in Lebanon since September - and has also targeted Hezbollah's leadership several times.

In addition, Israeli troops marched into southern Lebanon last month. Hezbollah has continued to bombard northern Israel almost daily for over a year, including with rockets.

Mohanad Hage Ali, a senior fellow at the Carnegie Middle East Center think tank who researches Hezbollah, told dpa Nasrallah was an inspirational figure and Qassem will not take his place as he has mainly focused on the "educational part."

Qassem can give a good sermon, but Nasrallah was "a man who spoke the language of the people" and it took him years to reach that point, Hage Ali said.

60 killed in Israeli strikes on eastern Lebanon

At least 60 people, including two children, were killed in Israeli strikes that targeted eastern Lebanon on Monday, the Lebanese Ministry of Health said.

Strikes targeted at least 12 different areas in the provinces of Baalbek-Hermel and Bekaa, leaving 58 people injured.

The toll was not final as rescue teams were still removing rubble.

Baalbek Governor Bashir Khodr wrote on Tuesday on social media platform X that there were 35 strikes on the province in the previous 24 hours.

"Today is the most violent day in Baalbek since the beginning of the Israeli aggression on Lebanon," Khodr posted.

The area is considered a Hezbollah stronghold.

Dozens reported killed in Israeli attack on north Gaza building

Dozens of people have died in an Israeli attack on a residential building in Beit Lahia in the north of the Gaza Strip, according to a report citing residents in the area on Tuesday.

Kamal Adwan Hospital director Hussam Abu Safia said residents had told him that 65 bodies had been found.

Ten bodies had arrived at the hospital, while other bodies were still in the ruins as there were no rescue workers to recover them, Abu Safia said, adding that dozens more had been injured.

The information could not be independently verified, and an Israeli military spokesman said the reports were being investigated.

Israel Defense Forces (IDF) troops have been conducting an intensive operation in the north of the Gaza Strip for weeks in fighting Hamas cells that have been broken up.

Tens of thousands of civilians have fled the area, and the situation with critical supplies is reported to be catastrophic.

Drones from Yemen and Lebanon launched at Israel

A drone launched from Yemen has come down near the Israeli coastal city of Ashkelon, the IDF reported on Tuesday after examining fragments of the drone.

It said also that Israeli air defences had intercepted another drone launched from Lebanon towards Western Galilee that had come down in open ground in Nahariya on the coast near the border with Lebanon. Fragments were identified in the area.

Iran to triple defence spending in next annual budget

Iran is to boost military spending radically in the face of increased regional tensions, government spokeswoman Fatemeh Mohajerani said in Tehran on Tuesday in announcing a 200% increase on the year.

The next budgetary year starts with Persian New Year at the end of March 2025.

Mohajerani did not say how the money would be allocated, and the plans could face criticism among a population suffering the effects of a severe economic crisis and high inflation.

With more than 600,000 active troops and around 350,000 reservists, Iran has one of the largest militaries in the Middle East.

The country has invested heavily in missiles and drones over recent years, while its air defences are seen as relatively weak.

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Social Pope Commission

Pope's commission against child abuse calls for greater transparency

Rome, Oct. 29, (dpa/GNA) - In its first annual report, Pope Francis' Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors has called for greater transparency in dealing with sexual abuse within the Catholic Church.

The report published on Tuesday, which spans 50 pages, stated that access to information about their cases is essential for victims of abuse by clergy and must be made easier.

The Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith, the powerful Vatican body responsible for doctrinal discipline and handling cases of sexual abuse, should work more transparently, the commission's report said.

The slow processing of cases and a culture of secrecy would lead to retraumatization for many abuse victims, it was asserted in the report.

According to the commission, the authority's refusal to publish statistics or its own judicial rulings also fuels the distrust of believers and victims of sexual abuse.

Among other suggestions, the commission's report proposes appointing an ombudsman to address the needs of the victims.

In the report, the commission also demanded that victims of abuse be granted the right to compensation. This could take the form of financial compensation or public apologies, which might aid their healing process, it said.

Francis established the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors in 2014, just a year after the start of his pontificate.

At the time, he announced his intention to decisively address cases of sexual abuse within the Catholic Church. The Church had been rocked by a scandal over decades-long abuse of children and young people.

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Social Vaccinator Killed

Policeman guarding polio vaccinators killed in Pakistan

Islamabad, Oct. 29, (dpa/GNA) – Gunmen shot and killed a policeman deployed on security detail for polio vaccinators in north-western Pakistan on Tuesday, in yet another attack on health workers as the country struggles to contain the spread of crippling disease.

Another policeman was wounded in the attack that took place in Orakzai district of the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa bordering Afghanistan, a local police officer said.

Police said that at least three militants behind the attack were chased and killed by the security forces.

The latest attack comes on the second day of a nationwide vaccination campaign targeting 45 million children under the age of 5.

The country, which had only six cases last year, has so far reported 41 new cases of polio.

Officials say that tens of thousands of children missed out on vaccines amid a recent surge in violence, contributing to the spike in new cases this year.

Militants linked with al-Qaeda often attack health workers. Dozens of vaccine handlers and security officials have been killed by Taliban militants in the past.

The militants accuse the health workers of acting as spies and claim the polio vaccine is intended to make Muslim children sterile.

Pakistan and neighbouring Afghanistan are among the few countries in the world where new polio cases still surface.

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Social Drone Chechnya

Kadyrov reports drone attack on police facility in Chechnya

Berlin, Oct. 29, (dpa/GNA) – A drone has struck a police building in the Chechen city of Gudermes to the east of Grozny causing a fire, Chechen strongman leader Ramzan Kadyrov reported on Telegram on Tuesday.

No one was injured in the attack. The facility is termed the Russian University for Special Units but is used extensively by Kadyrov's armed men. Russian President Vladimir Putin visited in August.

Kadyrov posted that an unused building had been struck, but images on social media showed a fire in the roof of the main building.

According to Russian media, the attack was the first drone attack in the Chechen Republic, part of the Russian Federation.

In his report, Kadyrov did not link the attack to the war in Ukraine, where Chechen troops are deployed alongside Russian forces.

Kadyrov is seen as having enemies in Chechnya and in Russia. He is currently engaged in a conflict with Wildberries, Russia's largest online retailer.

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Social Kabul Water

UNICEF warns of looming water crisis in Kabul

Islamabad, Oct. 29, (dpa/GNA) – The United Nations children’s agency UNICEF has issued a dire warning about the water crisis in Kabul, a city of nearly 5 million people, stating that the city could face severe water shortages by 2030 if immediate action is not taken.

Rapid urbanization and the impacts of climate change have led to a significant decline in groundwater levels in Kabul, the UN agency said in a statement on X.

"This is a humanitarian crisis that requires immediate support," Dr. Tajudeen Oyewale, UNICEF representative for Afghanistan said on X after visiting affected communities.

Experts have proposed using water from the Panjshir River to help supply Kabul as a potential solution to the crisis.

However, the country’s vulnerability to climate change, economic instability and the after-effects of decades of conflict pose significant challenges to implementing such projects.

According to the UN, nearly 80% of Afghanistan’s population lacks access to sufficient clean water.

Afghanistan is one of the countries most threatened by the climate crisis, even though it has hardly contributed to global emissions.

After decades of war and conflict, the country is extremely ill-prepared to cope with the consequences of climate change.

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Social Georgian Elections

Orbán terms Georgian elections democratic as spot recounts announced

Tbilisi, Oct. 29, (dpa/GNA) – Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán said on Tuesday that he did not doubt the victory of the nationalist Georgian Dream party in a contested election at the weekend, amid allegations of fraud and vote-buying.

"No one has come forward to say that this election or its result were not democratic – apart from critical opinions that were expressed," Orbán told local news agency Interpressnews while on a visit to Tbilisi.

Hungarian observers had judged the Sunday elections as "positive, free and in every aspect democratic," Orbán said.

He congratulated Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze on the victory of his Georgian Dream party, which garnered about 54% of the vote according to an official preliminary count.

Pro-Western opposition parties have termed the elections fraudulent, called protests and demanded that the polls be repeated. They fear that Georgian Dream will steer the country away from its current stated goal of joining the European Union.

District electoral officials are to conduct a series of spot checks on Monday to recount ballots, the Central Election Commission (CEC) announced on Tuesday.

"District election commissions will conduct recounts of ballots from five polling stations randomly selected in each election district," the CEC said.

"The polling stations have already been identified through casting the lots, and the results of the revealed election precincts will undergo a recount process," it added.

The recount is to start at 12 noon (0800 GMT), while the recount in Tbilisi will start at the later time of 5 pm.

Authorized national and international representatives have been invited to observe the ballot recount process.

Tens of thousands went onto the streets of Tbilisi on Monday evening to protest against the results and demand fresh elections under international supervision.

The criticisms by the election observers have, however, been directed rather at unfair campaigning conditions, attacks on opposition parties, vote-buying and pressure on voters than at the ballot count.

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Social Cocaine Police

Italian police bust three generations of cocaine-dealing family

Rome, Oct. 29, (dpa)/GNA – A drug-dealing ring operated by three generations of the same family from their home in the southern Italian city of Reggio Calabria has been bust, police reported on Tuesday.

The grandparents were detained on Tuesday, along with a son and grandson. They were electronically tagged and subsequently released under house arrest, the police report said.

The arrests came after a number of tip-offs from concerned neighbours, leading police to observe the apartment block where the family lived.

They were seen lowering buckets over the balcony to their customers, who removed the cocaine parcels and placed the money in the bucket.

The family is reported to have had dozens of customers and to have posted scouts around the house to warn of approaching police officers.

Reggio Calabria is seen in Italy as a social hotspot. The Archi quarter of Reggio Calabria has a high crime rate and is seen as a bastion of the 'Ndrangheta, the Calabrian Mafia.

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Social Germany Killings

Killings by German police at highest level in decades

Berlin, Oct. 29, (dpa/GNA) - German police officers have already fatally shot significantly more people while on duty this year than in previous years, according to an analysis of police reports by dpa.

Reports indicate that 17 people have died in police shootings since January. In the majority of cases, the fatal shots were fired in situations where the officers encountered men or women who were in a distressed psychological condition or were already receiving treatment for mental illness.

Several of the people who were shot during police operations were carrying knives.

According to statistics from the specialist magazine "Bürgerrechte & Polizei" ("Civil Rights & Police"), the last time such a high number of people were shot by the police in Germany was in 1999, when 19 people were fatally shot during the course of the entire year.

Police gunshots killed 10 people in 2023, after 11 deaths in 2022 and eight deaths in 2021.

The case of a 31-year-old woman who was shot dead in a Munich supermarket made the headlines this year.

The police later announced that she had been admitted to a psychiatric ward three times by the police. She was known to the police for narcotics offences.

A 20-year-old woman died last Thursday in the central German town of Schwalmstadt. According to the police, the woman pointed an object at police officers that looked "confusingly similar" to a firearm.

Another person fatally shot by police in Germany this year was an 18-year-old Austrian who opened fire at the Israeli Consulate General in Munich and the nearby Nazi Documentation Center on September 5.

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Social Climate Patrol

Schools cut short, climate squads patrol as Lahore hit by thick smog

Islamabad, Oct. 29, (dpa/GNA) – Pakistani authorities on Tuesday shortened school hours and deployed climate squads in Lahore to tackle emissions as air quality worsened to a level never seen before, officials said.

A thick layer of smog engulfed the eastern city for a second day, forcing authorities to cut school short by two hours as poor air quality made breathing difficult, local official Akif Khan said.

Lahore, a metropolis of more than 10 million people, was the world’s most polluted city on Monday and Tuesday, according to an international air quality index.

The level of poor air quality jumped past the previous record of 400 on Monday before decreasing to more than 200 on Tuesday, which is still considered very unhealthy.

“This is something never experienced in the city," said environment agency chief Raja Jahangir, blaming the situation on climate change.

The regional government deployed special police units called climate squads to check emissions by industrial units, vehicles with faulty engines, brick kilns and the burning of crops remains, Jahangir said.

Pakistan is among the top 10 countries most affected by the impact of climate change despite the South Asian nation’s relatively small contributions to the global carbon emissions, UN data shows.

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Social EU Tariffs

Major new EU tariffs on Chinese electric cars to take effect Thursday

Brussels, Oct. 29, (dpa/GNA) - EU tariffs of up to 35.3% on battery-powered electric vehicles from China will definitively enter into force on Thursday, according to a European Commission document posted online.

The tariffs are set to apply for five years in addition to the European Union's standard 10% import levy on cars.

Chinese companies affected include BYD hit with tariffs of 17%, Geely at 18.8% and SAIC at 35.3% according to the commission document online on Tuesday.

The commission announced the extra tariffs after an investigation accused Beijing of subsidizing domestic electric car manufacturers and thus distorting the market in the EU.

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Social Salmond Remembered

Salmond remembered as ‘outstanding’ politician and ‘dear friend’

Edinburgh, Oct. 29, (PA Media/dpa/GNA) – Former Scottish first minister Alex Salmond has been remembered as not just the political leader who took Scotland “so close to his dream of independence,” but as a “dear friend.”

Tributes were paid to the 69-year-old at a funeral service on Tuesday following his sudden death in North Macedonia earlier this month.

The former Scottish National Party (SNP) leader, who later went on to set up the Alba Party, had been speaking at a conference in the country when he suffered a heart attack.

Speaking at the funeral in Strichen, Aberdeenshire, where Salmond lived, acting Alba leader Kenny MacAskill paid tribute to the man who served as first minister of Scotland between 2007 and 2014.

MacAskill, who was justice secretary in Salmond’s government, hailed him as “a giant of a man, the leader of our country, the leader of our movement,” before describing him as “an inspiration, a political genius, an orator, debater and communicator without parallel.”

He said Salmond was “the outstanding political figure in Scotland not just of his generation but for generations past and likely for generations to come”.

MacAskill added: “The legacy he bequeathed is all around. From roads and bridges to rights such as free prescriptions and no tuition fees.”

Salmond’s niece Christina Hendry told the service that in the period since his death, “We have felt the grief of a nation, and beyond.”

Speaking at the service at Strichen Parish Church, which was attended only by family and close friends, she added: “For everyone in this room we have felt the loss differently.

“Uncle Alex was an important person to many, but to us he was a husband, a brother, an uncle, a colleague and a dear friend.”

Salmond took the SNP from a party of opposition into government in Scotland with a narrow victory over Labour in the 2007 Holyrood election.

After his SNP won an unprecedented overall majority in the Scottish parliament in 2011, then prime minister David Cameron agreed to its demands for an independence referendum.

While Scots voted to stay in the UK in the 2014 vote, MacAskill remembered Salmond as “a man who through his lifetime’s efforts restored pride in our nation and took us so close to his dream of independence.”

Speaking about Salmond, who is survived by his wife Moira, he added: “Politics wasn’t a career for him even if he excelled in its arts. He was committed to Scotland and independence, spurning overtures to join other parties.

“But he rejected them all.”

He said the former first minister “had a dream of what Scotland could be, and a strategy to achieve it,” as he recalled him “building a party which then took office, and which so nearly won the referendum.”

He recalled his time in office after the SNP first won the 2007, saying while Salmond led a team of ministers with no previous experience in government in a minority administration in Holyrood, his “vision and deft handling” had ensured that his government was “recognized even by opponents as credible, capable and competent.”

MacAskill went on to say that under Salmond the SNP had enjoyed “unprecedented electoral success in 2011” with its Holyrood majority “something unlikely ever to be repeated.”

While a “a very public figure,” MacAskill said Salmond had been “fiercely protective of his private life and Moira and the family," and was a “cherished and loving husband, brother, uncle,” as well as a “friend to many.”

After the funeral, conducted by Reverend Ian McEwen, piper Fergus Mutch, who previously worked for Salmond, led a procession to the cemetery at Strichen for a private service.

A public memorial service to remember Salmond will be held at a later date, while tributes will also be paid to him in the Scottish parliament on Wednesday, when a motion of condolence is expected to be held.

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