

Tough Penalties For Careless Drivers



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Society Desk

New tough traffic rules have been announced by Iran's Traffic Police, based on which careless drivers posing a risk to other drivers on the road will be punished severely.

Announcing this, Brigadier Eskandar Momeni, the head of Iran's Traffic Police, said about 10,000 driving offenders are on the verge of losing their driving licenses for ever.

"The driving offenders, who have received several warnings, will be de-

prived of driving for life," he said.

However, since the implementation of new traffic rules, the rate of accidents has declined significantly across the country.

"According to international statistics, for every 10,000 vehicles in the world, about 7.6 people lose their lives in accidents," he said. "The figure is 10 in Asia, but Iran has reduced the figure to 8.1."

Momeni said about 1,500 offending organizations have been found guilty of serious road accidents, which have been introduced to the court by police.

"Municipalities, Roads and Urban Development Ministry and Water and Wastewater Organization are among these bodies," he said.

The brigadier also said offensive drivers working for public transportation system will lose their licenses, according to new regulations.

"Transit companies and cooperatives whose drivers break traffic rules will lose their license as well," he said.

Southeastern Asian and African countries have the highest rate of road deaths and injuries.

According to World Health Organization, nearly 3,500 people die on the world's roads every day and tens of millions of people are injured or disabled every year. This amounts to a staggering death toll of 1,277,500.

Children, pedestrians, cyclists and the elderly are among the most vulnerable road users.

If the current trend were to continue, the number of road casualties will rise by 80 percent by 2020 and road accidents will become the third leading cause of disability across the world.

Call for Global Crackdown on Fake Medicines

A global treaty to crack down on the deadly trade of fake medicines is urgently needed, say experts.

Currently, there are more sanctions around the use of illegal tobacco than counterfeit drugs, BBC reported.

Writing in the British Medical Journal, experts urge the World Health Organization to set up a framework akin to its one tobacco control to safeguard the public.

WHO says more than one in every 10 drug products in poorer nations are fake.

A third of malaria drugs are counterfeit, research suggests.

In richer countries, medicine safety is better, but substandard and falsified drugs still cause thousands of adverse reactions and some deaths.

Recently, in the US, contaminated drug supplies caused an outbreak of meningitis that has so far killed 16 people.

Amir Attaran and colleagues from the World Federation of Public Health Associations, International Phar-



maceutical Federation and the International Council of Nurses say while governments and drug companies alike deplore unsafe medicines, it is difficult to achieve agreement on action because discussions too often trespass into conflict-prone areas such as phar-

maceutical pricing or intellectual property rights.

Although some countries prohibit fake medicines under national law, there is no global treaty, which means organized criminals can continue to trade using haven countries where laws are lax or absent.

WHO estimates nearly a third of countries have little or no medicine regulation.

In other contexts, global treaties have helped governments strengthen their laws and cooperate internationally to clamp down on havens—for example, on money laundering.

Similarly, a new protocol under the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control requires tobacco products to be tracked and criminalizes illicit trade globally—"oddly making the law tougher on cigarette falsification than on medicine falsification", says Attaran.

WHO says it provides direct country and regional support for strengthening medicines regulation.

And it is up to its 194 member-states to decide if a treaty is the way forward.

Mountain Gorilla Numbers Rise by 10%

The world's population of mountain gorillas has increased by more than 10 percent in two years, new census figures show.

A survey carried out in Uganda's Bwindi National Park and released by the Ugandan Wildlife Authority has found that numbers of the critically endangered species, Gorilla beringe beringe, have risen from an estimated 786 in 2010 to 880 today, Guardian reported.

Threats to the mountain gorilla, including war, habitat destruction and disease, were once thought to be so severe that the species could become extinct by the end of the 20th century, but the

population has increased significantly in the last 30 years.

Drew McVey, species program manager at WWF-UK, who supported the census as part of the International Gorilla Conservation Program, said he believed the latest increase was due to conservation efforts that had successfully engaged the local community.

"Mountain gorillas have only survived because of conservation. Protected areas are better managed and resourced than they have ever been, and our work is a lot more cross-cutting to address threats—we don't just work with the animals in the national parks, but also with the people."

McVey said conservation now balanced species survival against the needs of an incredibly poor area with high population pressures, for example, tackling the loss of gorilla habitat due to the illegal collection of firewood by providing the community with access to alternative energy sources.

Mountain gorillas, a subspecies of the eastern lowland gorilla, live in mountain forests in only two locations in the world—Bwindi in southwest Uganda and the Virunga Massif, a range of extinct volcanoes that border the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Uganda and Rwanda.

According to the census report, there



are more than 400 mountain gorillas in Bwindi, living in 36 distinct social groups, with 16 solitary males. Ten of these social groups are accustomed to human presence for either tourism or research.

World 2011 CO2 Emissions Up 2.5%

Global carbon dioxide (CO2) emissions in 2011 rose 2.5 percent to 34 billion tons, a new record, Germany's renewable energy institute said on Tuesday.

The IWR, which advises German ministries, cited recovered industrial activity after the end of the global economic crisis of recent years, KhaleejTimes reported.

"If the current trend is sustained, worldwide CO2 emissions will go up by another 20 percent to over 40 billion tons by 2020," IWR director Norbert Althoff said.

China led the table of emitters in 2011 with 8.9 billion tons, up from 8.3 billion a year earlier. Its CO2 output was

50 percent more than the 6 billion tons in the United States.

India was third, ahead of Russia, Japan and Germany.

In May, the International Energy Agency said global CO2 emissions rose 3.2 percent last year to 31.6 billion tons, led by China.

The IWR has long been tabling proposals to put brakes on the rising use of fossil fuels and stabilize global CO2 emissions by linking each country's CO2 output to mandatory investment in climate-protecting equipment and renewable.

It noted that there was no consensus on trying to cap CO2 because such proposals exposed big emitters to criticism

and put pressure on politicians to defend the threatened competitiveness of their macroeconomies.

Global CO2 emissions are 50 percent above those in 1990, the basis year for the Kyoto Climate Protocol. The first period of the Kyoto Protocol ends on Dec. 31 and moves straight into a new commitment period.

The length of the new period should be decided when world leaders meet in Doha this month at a UN summit on global efforts to tackle climate change. The summit aims to finalize a new binding emissions reduction agreement by 2015, which would come into force in 2020.

News in Brief

China Turns to Industrial Farming

China needs to replace millions of workers who have quit farms for cities, but even its vast state power might not be able to transform the countryside into a network of big industrial farms capable of feeding its growing economy.

Pulling together small plots of land to make larger operations and introducing modern mechanical techniques would help boost productivity, vital if China's agricultural sector is to meet soaring domestic food demand, Reuters reported.

But efforts to modernize the sector are struggling to gain traction because many farmers are suspicious about giving up their land, and even for some mechanized farms, there are too few workers.

Guaranteeing food security is a major tenet of the ruling Communist Party. The country is self-sufficient in rice and wheat, but is struggling to meet corn demand and has long given up trying to satisfy soy demand. It is the world's biggest importer of soybeans and a major buyer of corn.

It has increased grains output for nine straight years and aims to add 50 million tons per year by 2020 to the record 571.21 million tons of grain harvested in 2011.

Some say China should give up its fixation with self-sufficiency and take advantage of growing grains trade internationally.

Haiti Facing Food Shortage

The UN in Haiti says 1.5 million people remain at risk of not having proper access to food in 2013 due to the destruction caused by Hurricane Sandy and other natural disasters.

The situation has been made worse by a drought earlier this year, it says, AFP reported.

At least 54 people died as Hurricane Sandy hit the impoverished Caribbean nation two weeks ago.

The country is still struggling to recover from a devastating earthquake in January 2010.

During the spring and summer of this year, rural households in northern parts of Haiti were badly hit by drought.

Then, Tropical Storm Isaac caused extensive damage in August.

Two months of heavy rain followed before Haiti was hit by Hurricane Sandy on 23 October.

An estimated 21,000 people were left homeless by the hurricane, which also destroyed at least 70 percent of crops of yam, corn and banana in the south of the country.

India Unveils

World's Cheapest Tablet

India has launched a new version of what is dubbed the world's cheapest computer, on sale to students at the subsidized price of \$20, with a quicker processor and an improved battery.

The Aakash tablet has been developed as a public-private partnership aimed at making computing technology available to students in a country where only one in ten uses the Internet, Arab News reported.

Makers of the tablet, Britain-based Datawind, say the Aakash 2 is powered by a processor that runs three times faster than the original. It also has a bigger touchscreen and a battery with a life of three hours.

The government in October last year launched the first version of Aakash but it was marred by problems, including a short battery life, initial long waiting lists and difficulties with distribution.

The paperback-book-sized Aakash 2, developed by Indian engineers at elite public universities operated by the Indian Institute of Technology, has a screen measuring seven inches (18 centimeters).

More than 15,000 teachers at 250 colleges have been trained in the use of Aakash for education, according to the human resource development ministry.

Earthquake Dangers in Spain

At least six earthquakes registering above seven on the Richter scale struck a little-known Spanish fault in the recent past, according to new research.

The finding suggests that the fault in Southeast Spain is more active than previously thought and could pose a potential hazard to people living in the region, according to the study published in the Geological Society of America Bulletin in October, YahooNews reported.

The study also found that the fault has given rise to unusual earthquakes.

"During earthquakes, the entire length of the fault does not break," said Jose J. Martinez Diaz, a study co-author and researcher at the Complutense University of Madrid, in a statement.

"It does so in segments."

These ruptures could give rise to larger earthquakes than previously thought.

"This fault has already produced an earthquake of magnitude 6.5 or 7, thousands of years ago, and could do so again tomorrow," Martinez Diaz said. "As a result, it is vital to bear in mind the earthquake-risk calculations and building codes on the area."

The seismic danger in the area has been underestimated because, until now, officials made estimates of earthquake likelihood based on records from only the last 2,000 years, according to the release.