



ETHIOPIA CIVIL WAR PM rejects 'interference'

AFP, Addis Ababa

Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed yesterday said he rejected international "interference" in Ethiopia's affairs, hours before a deadline for Tigray's rebellious leaders to surrender or face an assault on their capital.

Abiy, the winner of last year's Nobel Prize, late Sunday gave the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) 72 hours to surrender -- an ultimatum rejected by the leader of the dissident northern region, who has said his people are "ready to die" for their homeland.

As the clock ticked down, the UN Security Council held its first meeting on the three-week old crisis, with particular concern for civilians in the regional capital Mekele.

Ethiopian forces say they are encircling the city with tanks ahead of an assault on the TPLF, and have urged its half million residents to leave.

Rights groups have warned that attacking the city could constitute a war crime. The UN, US, EU and others have urged restraint, and called for an immediate halt to hostilities.

Fighting between the Ethiopian army and Tigrayan forces has raged since November 4, when Abiy ordered a military response to what he said were TPLF attacks on federal military camps.

More than 40,000 refugees have fled the violence into eastern Sudan, and rockets have fallen on the Eritrean capital Asmara and Ethiopian cities outside Tigray, spurring fears the conflict could widen.

AFGHANISTAN AID CONFERENCE \$12b pledged with conditions

AFP, Geneva

Donors demanded an immediate ceasefire in Afghanistan as they pledged around \$12 billion in aid over four years -- but tied their money to civil rights being upheld in peace talks with the Taliban.

At a virtual global donor conference hosted from the UN in Geneva, countries affirmed their commitment to propping up a nation beset by violence between the Taliban and government forces, rampant corruption and an imminent withdrawal of US troops.

The international community called for an "immediate permanent and comprehensive ceasefire", as at least 14 people were killed in central Afghanistan when two blasts ripped through the historic city of Bamiyan, home to many members of the mainly Shia Hazara ethnic minority.

The twin bombing marked the latest big attack in Afghanistan, where violence has surged in recent months even as Taliban and Afghan government negotiators are meeting for peace talks in Qatar.

Efforts to rebuild Afghanistan began soon after a US-led invasion ousted the hardline Taliban regime from power in the wake of the September 11, 2001 attacks on the United States. Donor nations gather every four years to pledge aid to Afghanistan, which is almost entirely reliant on foreign assistance despite years of promised reforms and attempts to grow the economy.

The Geneva conference insisted that the gains made over the last 19 years must be secured, namely democracy, the rule of law and human rights -- notably those of women, minorities and children.

With the final figures still to be collated, donors had pledged more than \$3 billion for 2021.

Annual commitments are expected to stay at that level, dependent on Kabul's performance, said Finnish development minister Ville Skinnari, who co-chaired the conference.



President-elect Joe Biden stands with his nominees for his national security team at his transition headquarters in the Queen Theater in Wilmington, Delaware, US, on Tuesday. (L-R), are: Antony Blinken to be secretary of state; Jake Sullivan to be U.S. national security adviser; Alejandro Mayorkas to be secretary of Homeland Security; Avril Haines to be director of national intelligence; John Kerry to be a special envoy for climate change; and Ambassador to the United Nations-nominee Linda Thomas-Greenfield, who stands behind Vice President-elect Kamala Harris.

PHOTO: REUTERS

'Failure not an option'

Incoming US envoy Kerry vows to seek greater climate goals

AFP, Wilmington

Incoming US climate envoy John Kerry called Tuesday for a UN conference in Glasgow next year to raise global ambitions on environmental protection, warning that the Paris accord that he helped negotiate was insufficient.

President-elect Joe Biden has tapped the former secretary of state for the new position of presidential envoy on climate change, a sign of the importance the United States will assign the issue once he takes office on January 20.

"To end this crisis, the whole world must come together," Kerry said after Biden introduced him as part of his national security team in Wilmington, Delaware.

Speaking to Biden, Kerry said: "You're right to rejoin Paris on day one, and you're right to recognize that Paris alone is not enough."

"At the global meeting in Glasgow one year from now, all nations must raise ambition together or we will all fail together. And failure is not an option," Kerry said.

Outgoing President Donald Trump, whose administration is close to the fossil fuel industry, called the Paris accord unfair to the United States,

which became the only nation to exit the global pact.

Biden also said he would unveil next month a White House policy coordinator to lead climate measures within the United States, where carbon emissions have been declining modestly due to a variety of market forces and local state initiatives. "Let me be clear: I don't for a minute underestimate the difficulties of meeting my bold commitments to fighting climate change," Biden said.

"But at the same time, no one should underestimate for a minute my determination to do just that."

Negotiated by Kerry when he was the top US diplomat, the 2015 Paris accord committed all nations to limit warming to two degrees Celsius (3.6 Fahrenheit) above pre-industrial levels and encouraged them to go down to 1.5 degrees.

Scientists warn that the world is far behind in reaching the two-degree goal -- a level at which the planet will still see major effects but not the most catastrophic consequences of climate change such as widespread drought and submerged coastal areas.

The incoming Biden administration has said it is willing to work on climate change with China despite other disagreements.

2020 GLOBAL TERRORISM INDEX

Deaths from attacks fall globally in 2019

AFP, Paris

The number of people killed in terror attacks worldwide fell for the fifth consecutive year in 2019, with conflict still the main driver of terror but an increase of "far-right terrorism" seen in the West, a leading think tank said yesterday.

Deaths from terrorism fell in 2019 to 13,826, a 15 percent fall from the year before and a further annual decline from a peak in 2014, the Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP) said in its 2020 Global Terrorism Index.

It warned that in North America, Western Europe and Oceania, deaths attributed to far-right terror have increased by 250 percent since 2014, with 89 killings in 2019.

"They are higher now than at any time in the last 50 years," it said. It emphasised that conflict remains the primary driver of terrorism, with over 96 percent of deaths from terrorism in 2019 occurring in countries already in conflict.

It said the largest decreases in deaths occurred in Afghanistan and Nigeria but they remained "the only two countries to have experienced more than 1,000 deaths from terrorism."

For the second year in a row, South Asia was the region most impacted by terrorism, it said.

NEWS IN BRIEF

UP criminalises 'love jihad'

India's ruling Hindu nationalist party approved a decree in the country's most populous state Uttar Pradesh on Tuesday laying out prison terms up to five years for anyone compelling others to convert their faith or luring them into these conversions through marriage, officials said. The move follows a campaign by hardline Hindu groups against some interfaith marriages that they describe as "love jihad", Muslim men engaging in a conspiracy to turn Hindu women away from their religion by seducing them. Under the new law, a man and woman belonging to different religions will have to give two months' notice to the district magistrate before they get married and they will be allowed to tie the knot if there are no objections.

Trump may pardon Flynn

US President Donald Trump plans to pardon his former national security advisor Michael Flynn, who pleaded guilty in 2017 to lying to the FBI over his Russian contacts, US media reported Tuesday. Axios and the New York Times both cited unnamed sources as saying that Trump plans to include Flynn in a series of pardons he will issue in the final days of his presidency. Flynn's secret talks with the Russian ambassador to Washington in December 2016, before Trump was inaugurated, were a cornerstone of the sprawling investigation by Special Counsel Robert Mueller into Moscow's meddling in the US election earlier that year.

Khamenei warns against hopes of 'opening' with West



Iran's supreme leader has cautioned against hopes of an "opening" with the West, after President Hassan Rouhani's government signalled a readiness to engage with US President-elect Joe Biden. Biden, who defeated Donald Trump at the ballot box on November 3, has promised a return to diplomacy with Iran after four tense years under the hawkish outgoing US president. "We can't trust foreigners and hope for an opening on their part," Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei said at a meeting with Rouhani, parliament speaker Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf and judicial chief Ebrahim Raisi, according to Khamenei's office. "We tried to lift sanctions once and negotiated for several years, but to no avail," he said in remarks aired on state television, referring to the 2015 Iran nuclear deal.

SOURCE: AFP, REUTERS



A pro-democracy protester holds up a mock banknote during an anti-government rally outside the headquarters of the Siam Commercial Bank in Bangkok yesterday. Thai pro-democracy protesters gathered in Bangkok yesterday as police summoned 12 of their leaders to answer charges of royal defamation, the first use of the draconian law in almost three years. The focus of yesterday's protest is the secrecy surrounding the royal finances.

PHOTO: AFP

Homes evacuated as cyclone nears India

AFP, Puducherry

Several thousand people in south-eastern India fled their homes yesterday, out of the path of a cyclone due to slam coastal areas after midnight, bringing with it heavy rain. Nivar, classified as a very severe cyclonic storm, was expected to pack winds of 120 kilometres per hour and gusts of up to 145 km/h when it makes landfall, forecasters said. Thousands of state and national emergency personnel have been deployed in the southern regions of Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and Puducherry.

Scotland becomes first country to offer free period products

AFP, Edinburgh

Scotland on Tuesday voted to offer free universal access to period products, becoming the first country in the world to do so.

The Scottish Parliament voted unanimously in favour of the Period Products Bill, which makes it a legal right to have free access to sanitary products in public buildings.

"We all agree that no one should have to worry where their next tampon pads or reusable is coming from," Monica Lennon, the MSP who introduced the bill, said before the Edinburgh vote.

"Scotland will not be the last country to consign period poverty to history but we have the chance to be the first. This has been a long time coming."

Sanitary products are free for pupils and students in Scotland, but the bill now places a legal duty on ministers to set up a country-wide scheme to ensure anyone can get access to them.

Schools, colleges and universities must also make a range of period products available for free in their toilets.

Lennon said that while the legislation was "world-leading", schools should also offer education to pupils to end the stigma of periods.

Aileen Campbell, Scotland's Cabinet Secretary for Communities and Local Government, said the bill sent an "important message about the kind of country we want Scotland to be."

"That is a gender-equal Scotland, where no one has to go through the indignity of using unsuitable materials to mask their periods or stretch household budgets further to buy products for their children, or miss out on education -- a Scotland where no one has to hide a tampon up their sleeve," she said.

O2 supply still not optimised

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other than the dedicated Covid-19 hospitals, Dr Farid Hossain Miah, director of hospitals and clinics at the DGHS, said, "We have plans to set up centralised oxygen supply systems. We are working on it."

However, Abu Hena Morshed Zaman, director of central medicine store depot (CMSD), however, said they have sufficient oxygen cylinders in stock even if the number of patients increases.

"If the health directorate cannot set up centralised oxygen system for strategic reasons, then I can say the CMSD is ready to provide support. We have 9,650 cylinders in hand," Zaman, who is also an additional secretary of the government, said.

Experts, however, said, this is futile. "Cylinders cannot make up for the demand of centralised oxygen systems," Prof Sayedur Rahman, chairman of pharmacology at the BSMMU, told The Daily Star.

Experts have long been stressing the need for uninterrupted oxygen supply at hospitals for critical Covid-19 patients. Putting emphasis on this, the prime minister on June 2 ordered that intensive care units (ICUs) be set up at all district hospitals.

Subsequently, the health ministry had started taking steps to set up centralised oxygen supply systems at 79 district hospitals.

Nearly five months later when the top DGHS officials were asked about those hospitals, they evaded the question. At present, 24 dedicated Covid-19 hospitals in the country have centralised oxygen supply systems, according to the latest data from the Management Information System of the DGHS.

SCREENING STILL LAX
Despite some progress, the government is struggling to implement the guideline on ensuring that no passenger is allowed come from a foreign destination without a negative Covid-19 certificate, Dr Shahnila Ferdousi, director of the Center for Disease Control at the DGHS, said while talking about the latest state of screening at the country's entry points.

"We have sent a letter to the Civil Aviation Authority of Bangladesh to ensure that airlines do not carry passengers without Covid-19 certificates, but it is not working."

She also said the screening situation has improved, but there is lots still to do.

NO PROGRESS ON RAPID ANTIGEN TESTING
Authorities have also failed to announce any hard deadline for introducing the much-talked-about antigen-based rapid testing.

"We will start training staffers to conduct antigen-based rapid testing

from next week and hopefully will be able to introduce rapid testing next month," Prof Meerjady Sabrina Flora, additional director general of the health directorate, told journalists in the meeting.

Asked about a specific timeline, she said, "We cannot say right now."

The DGHS is planning to introduce rapid testing in 10 district headquarters where there are no RT-PCR test facilities, she added.

She also spoke of different technical issues regarding the introduction of rapid testing.

Asked whether necessary antigen kits have been imported, she said, "We have a few and will bring more soon."

The health services division of the health ministry on September 17 approved the antigen rapid testing kit after months of bureaucratic exercises.

Officials in the press meet said the testing protocol for antigen-based rapid tests was awaiting the health ministry's approval.

DGHS Director General Prof ABM Khurshid Alam said, "Taking today's suggestions from journalists into consideration, we will be able to undertake rest of the tasks ahead. We had or have shortcomings in promotional activities; we are trying to move forward. However, you have to come forward too."

Microcredit Regulatory Authority

Gulfeshan Plaza (6th floor), 8 Shahid Sangbadik Selina Pervin Sarak
Baro Mogbazar, Ramna, Dhaka-1217
Web: www.mra.gov.bd

Ref No: 53.04.0000.002.07.002.20-2672 Date: - 25 / 11 / 2020

Invitation for e-Tender (Goods)

e-tenders are invited in the National e-GP System Portal (<http://www.eprocure.gov.bd>) for the procurement of following goods:

SL No.	Tender/Proposal ID. No	Name of Tender	Tender Document last selling / downloading Date and Time	Tender Closing & Opening Date and Time
1.	499573	Procurement of Computers and Related Accessories/Other Equipment	13-December-2020 at 4.00 PM	14-December-2020 at 12:00 PM

This is an online Tender, where only e-Tender will be accepted in the National e-GP portal and no offline/ hard copies will be accepted.

To submit e-Tenders, registration required in the National e-GP System Portal (<http://www.eprocure.gov.bd>). The fees for downloading the e-Tender Documents from the National e-GP System Portal have to be deposited through any registered bank.

Further information and guidelines are available in the National e-GP Portal and e-GP help Desk (helpdesk@eprocure.gov.bd).

Sd/-
(Amalendu Mukherjee)
Executive Vice Chairman
Microcredit Regulatory Authority
Fax : 02-8333257
email: evc@mra.gov.bd

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