



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.

'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 and 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.

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 states of Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and Puducherry.

Scores of pilot whales dead in NZ stranding

AFP, Wellington

Almost 100 pilot whales have died in a mass stranding on New Zealand's remote Chatham Islands, conservation officials said yesterday. Most of the marine mammals beached themselves over the weekend but rescue efforts were hampered by the area's isolated location, about 800 kilometres east of the South Island. The Chatham Islands was the site of New Zealand's largest recorded mass stranding, when 1,000 beached themselves in 1918.

Israeli strikes in Syria kill 8 pro-Iran fighters

AFP, Beirut

Israeli air strikes in Syria overnight killed at least eight fighters operating in pro-Iran militias, a war monitoring group said yesterday. The strikes targeted an arms depot and a position held by Iranian forces and their Lebanese ally Hezbollah near the capital Damascus, and a pro-Iran militia position in southern Syria, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said.



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

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

Mutations not making virus able to spread more rapidly

REUTERS, London

The Covid-19-causing coronavirus is mutating as it spreads around the world in the pandemic, but none of the mutations currently documented appears to be making it able to spread more rapidly, scientists said yesterday.

In a study using a global dataset of virus genomes from 46,723 people with COVID-19 from 99 countries, researchers identified more than 12,700 mutations, or changes, in the SARS-CoV-2 virus.

"Fortunately, we found that none of these mutations are making Covid-19 spread more rapidly," said Lucy van Dorp, a professor at University College London's Genetics Institute and one of the co-lead researchers on the study.

She added, however: "We need to remain vigilant and continue monitoring new mutations, particularly as vaccines get rolled out."

Viruses are known to mutate all the time, and some - such as flu viruses - change more frequently than others. Most mutations are

neutral, but some can be either advantageous or detrimental to the virus, and some can make vaccines against them less effective. When viruses change like this, vaccines against them have to be adapted regularly to ensure they are hitting the right target.

With the SARS-CoV-2 virus, the first vaccines to show efficacy against the disease it causes could get regulatory approval and begin to be used to immunise people before the end of the year.

Francois Balloux, a UCL professor who also worked on the study, said that its findings, for now, posed no threat to Covid-19 vaccine efficacy, but cautioned that the imminent introduction of vaccines could exert new selective pressures on the virus to mutate to try to evade the human immune system.

The research team from Britain's UCL and Oxford University, and from France's Cirad and Université de la Réunion, analysed virus genomes from 46,723 people with Covid-19 from 99 countries.

Among more than 12,706 mutations identified, some 398 appeared to have occurred repeatedly and independently, the researchers said.



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.



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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).

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