

UN in cash crunch

Guterres says it may run out of money by end of the month

AFP, United Nations

The United Nations is running a deficit of \$230 million, Secretary General Antonio Guterres said on Monday, and may run out of money by the end of October.

In a letter intended for the 37,000 employees at the UN secretariat and obtained by AFP, Guterres said unspecified "additional stop-gap measures" would have to be taken to ensure salaries and entitlements are paid.

"Member States have paid only 70 per cent of the total amount needed for our regular budget operations in 2019. This translates into a cash shortage of \$230 million at the end of September. We run the risk of depleting our backup liquidity reserves by the end of the month," he wrote.

To cut costs, Guterres mentioned postponing conferences and meetings and reducing services, while also restricting official travel to only essential activities and taking measures to save energy.

Guterres had asked member states earlier this year to up contributions to the world body to head off cash flow problems, but they refused, a UN official said on condition of anonymity.

"The ultimate responsibility for our financial health lies with Member States," Guterres said.

Not including what it pays for peacekeeping operations, the UN's operating budget for 2018-2019 is close to \$5.4 billion, with the United States contributing 22 percent.



Extinction Rebellion protesters are pictured at Whitehall blocking a road, in London, yesterday. *Inset*, A climate activist laughs as police arrest her in London. London police have made nearly 500 arrests as climate-change protesters continue two weeks of civil disobedience to push for more to be done to protect the environment. The Extinction Rebellion group has been taking action in several countries including Britain, Germany, Austria, Australia, France and New Zealand as it lobbies politicians to go further in cutting carbon emissions.

PHOTO: REUTERS

US, UK not helping 1961 UN plane crash probe

A lawyer appointed by the United Nations to probe the mysterious 1961 plane crash death of secretary-general Dag Hammarskjöld said Monday that the United States, Britain and South Africa were withholding information.

Tanzanian lawyer Mohamed Chande Othman said in a report that he would need more time to finish his review. Hammarskjöld had been traveling in an Albertina DC6 near the city of Ndola in what was then known as Northern Rhodesia when the crash occurred. Fifteen other people died in the disaster. At the time, the Swedish diplomat was seeking to unite Congo and stop the mineral-rich Katanga province from seceding. Two investigations concluded the crash was caused by pilot error. But since 2014, new probes have focused on a possible plot.

Macron vows 'unrelenting fight' against terror

French President Emmanuel Macron vowed an "unrelenting fight" against Islamist extremists yesterday as he paid tribute to the four Paris police staff stabbed to death last week by a radicalised colleague. Mickael Harpon, a 45-year-old computer expert in the police intelligence-gathering department, used a kitchen knife and an oyster shucker to kill three male and one female colleague in a 30-minute rampage that ended when an officer shot him in the head. The attack in the police's inner sanctum caused shock in France, where the government is being pressed to answer how Harpon's radicalisation went unnoticed, despite him having high-level security clearance.

Thursday's attack brought to 255 the number of people killed in attacks blamed on, or claimed by Islamist radicals since 2015.

Cate Blanchett urges world to tackle statelessness



Goodwill Ambassador to the UN refugee agency and Hollywood star Cate Blanchett pleaded Monday for an end to the devastating limbo suffered by millions of stateless people worldwide, saying they are left to wallow in "total invisibility". In 2014, UNHCR estimated there were around 10 million stateless people worldwide, but High Commissioner Filippo Grandi told journalists last week that the true numbers were unclear since many such people "are quite invisible". Grandi stressed that solutions were urgently needed for millions without citizenship or at risk of becoming stateless, including Myanmar's Rohingya and in India's Assam.

SOURCE: AFP

Stop playing 'stupid' blame game

EU tells UK PM over Brexit impasse; Merkel says deal 'unlikely'

REUTERS, London/Brussels

The European Union accused Britain of playing a "stupid blame game" over Brexit yesterday after a Downing Street source said a deal was essentially impossible because German Chancellor Angela Merkel had made unacceptable demands.

With just 23 days before the United Kingdom is due to leave the bloc, the future of Brexit remains deeply uncertain and both London and Brussels are positioning themselves to avoid blame for a delay or a disorderly no-deal Brexit.

In a sign that Johnson's last-ditch proposals to bridge the impasse have failed, a Downing Street source said Merkel and Johnson spoke yesterday morning and she made clear that a deal was "overwhelmingly unlikely".

The Downing Street source said that if Merkel's position on Northern Ireland remaining in the EU's customs union was the bloc's position, then a deal was impossible.

"If this represents a new established position then it means a deal is essentially impossible not just now but ever," the Downing Street source said. A spokesman for the German chancellor confirmed the call had taken place but declined to

comment further.

The EU was scathing.

"Boris Johnson, what's at stake is not winning some stupid blame game," European Council President Tusk said on Twitter. "At stake is the future of Europe and the UK as well as the security and interests of our people. You don't want a deal, you don't want an extension, you don't want to



Germany says N Ireland must stay in EU customs union

UK says deal will be 'impossible' if EU doesn't compromise

revoke, quo vadis?"

Such abrupt remarks indicate the Brexit blame game has begun in earnest, and that now both London and European capitals

are preparing for an acrimonious and potentially chaotic Brexit for which neither side wants to be held responsible.

A disorderly Brexit could rip apart the United Kingdom, hurt global growth and shape the future of the EU which was built on the World War Two ruins of Europe.

Merkel said that for a deal, Northern Ireland would have to stay in the EU's customs union and full alignment with the EU forever, the Downing Street source said.

The leader of the small Northern Irish party that supports Johnson's government accused the EU and Ireland of trying to trap the British territory in a permanent customs union.

Johnson has consistently said the United Kingdom will leave the EU on Oct. 31 with or without a deal, though a law passed by parliament demands he write a letter to the EU asking for a delay if he cannot strike an exit deal by Oct 19.

He has said he would abide by the law but Britain would leave the EU by the end of the month, without explaining that contradiction. He has also repeatedly demanded an election but parliament has refused to grant one.

US-AFGHAN JOINT RAID IN AFGHANISTAN

South Asia region Qaeda chief killed

AFP, Kabul

The leader of al-Qaeda's South Asian branch was killed in a US-Afghan joint raid in southern Afghanistan last month, Afghan officials confirmed yesterday.

Asim Umar, who led al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS) from its inception in 2014, was killed during a raid September 23 on a Taliban compound in the Musa Qala district of Helmand province.

Afghanistan's National Directorate of Security said Umar was a Pakistani citizen, though some reports claim he was born in India.

He "was #killed along with six other AQIS members," the NDS said on Twitter.

The middle-aged Umar was relatively unknown when he was picked to lead the newly created AQIS in 2014. The jihadist branch was established to try to rouse fighters in India, Bangladesh and Myanmar.

Authorities said they would investigate reports that 40 civilians, including children, were killed in an airstrike during the operation.

Under a stalled withdrawal plan negotiated between the US and the Taliban, Washington agreed to pull troops from Afghanistan if the insurgents abide by security guarantees and cut all ties with al-Qaeda.

The US invaded Afghanistan after the Taliban refused to hand over al-Qaeda's leader Osama bin Laden following the September 11, 2001 attacks against America.

NEWSIN brief

Tourists restrictions to be lifted in J&K

AFP, New Delhi

Tourists warned by India to leave Kashmir just days before stripping the restive valley of its autonomy will be welcomed back starting from tomorrow, the region's governor said Monday. Authorities in early August called for holiday-makers to leave "immediately" over "terror threats" to a major Hindu pilgrimage, sending thousands scrambling for places on planes and buses.

Russia honours US astronaut

AFP, Moscow

Russia has decorated NASA astronaut Nick Hague, who survived an aborted space launch last year, with one of its highest honours, the Order of Courage, a Kremlin decree said yesterday. Hague along with Russian cosmonaut Aleksey Ovchinin had a close brush with death when their Soyuz rocket failed minutes after blast-off from Baikonur cosmodrome in Kazakhstan in October last year. They were forced to eject and make a harrowing emergency landing.

24,000 tourists visit S Arabia in 10 days

AFP, Riyadh

Saudi Arabia welcomed 24,000 tourists in the 10 days after it issued tourism visas for the first time, state television reported yesterday. Saudi Arabia announced on September 27 it would start offering tourist visas, opening up the kingdom to holidaymakers as part of a push to diversify its economy away from oil.



Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi (C) holds a bow and arrow ahead of the burning of the effigy of the Hindu demon Ravana at an event marking the Hindu festival of Dussehra in New Delhi yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

China intervention in HK can't be ruled out

Says Carrie Lam as unrest paralyses the city

REUTERS, Hong Kong

Hong Kong's embattled leader Carrie Lam did not rule out asking Beijing for help, as the Asian financial hub struggles to deal with months of often violent anti-government protests that are damaging its economy.

Lam said yesterday Beijing wanted Hong Kong to solve its own problems, but under its mini-constitution, known as the Basic Law, Hong Kong could ask Beijing for help.

"If the situation becomes so bad, then no options could be ruled out, if we want Hong Kong to at least have another chance," Lam said at weekly news conference after a long weekend of violence crippled the city.

"But at this moment, I and my team, we are still very committed in making sure we can use our own instruments ... to try and restore calm and order in Hong Kong," she said, adding there were no plans to expand emergency laws introduced on Friday.

"But I would appeal (to) everyone



in society to join hands to achieve this objective."

The protests, which show no sign of abating, pose the biggest popular challenge to Chinese President Xi Jinping since he came to power in 2012 and are Hong Kong's thorniest political crisis since Britain returned it to China in 1997.

Lam said protests were severely damaging the economy. "Hong Kong's various sectors will enter a severe winter season," she said.

Tens of thousands of protesters took to the streets of Hong Kong over the weekend wearing face masks, despite Lam having banned masks under colonial-era emergency laws invoked on Friday. Protesters have been using masks to shield their identities and to protect their faces from police tear gas.

Police said yesterday 77 people had been arrested for violating the anti-mask law.

Since Friday, more than 200 shops and public utilities had been damaged and police fired 367 tear gas rounds, said a police spokesman.

Don't go too far

Trump warns Turkey a day after clearing way for Ankara to launch offensive against Kurdish militants in Syria

AFP, Istanbul

Turkey yesterday said it was ready for an offensive against Kurdish militants in northern Syria despite mixed signals from US President Donald Trump over whether he had approved the operation.

The United States pulled back 50 to 100 "special operators" from Syria's northern frontier on Monday, where they had served as a buffer preventing a long-planned assault by the Turkish military against Kurdish forces.

Trump's surprise move drew heavy criticism from top Republicans that he was abandoning the Kurds, who were crucial in the years-long campaign to defeat Islamic State.

But he later appeared to backpedal, warning Turkey that he would "obliterate" the country's economy if it went too far -- without explaining what that meant.

"If Turkey does anything that I, in my great and unmatched wisdom, consider to be off limits, I will totally destroy and obliterate the Economy of Turkey (I've done before!)," Trump tweeted.

Ankara brushed aside the threat on Tuesday, with Vice-

President Fuat Oktay saying: "Turkey is not a country that will act according to threats."

Turkey has always pushed hard against Washington's support for Kurdish forces in Syria due to their links with the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) which is fighting a bloody insurgency against the Turkish state since 1984.

Its defence ministry tweeted that preparations for an offensive in northern Syria have been "completed".

Trump yesterday said he hasn't abandoned the Kurds in Syria. "We may be in the process of leaving Syria, but in no way have we Abandoned

the Kurds, who are special people and wonderful fighters," Trump tweeted yesterday.

Iran, a key backer of the Syrian government, also said it opposed any military action by Turkey.

Ankara says it wants to establish a "safe zone" on the Syrian side of the border where it could send back some of the 3.6 million refugees from the eight-year civil war.

A Turkish attack raised the specter of some 10,000 Islamic State fighters currently held by the SDF being let loose if SDF soldiers have to battle Turkish troops.

Turkey vows not to bow to threats, says preparations for offensive 'completed'

Iran opposes any offensive in Syria

Trump says US has not 'abandoned the Kurds' in Syria

