

FIGHT AGAINST AIDS, TB, MALARIA Macron presses donors for \$14bn fund

AFP, Lyon

French President Emmanuel Macron yesterday urged donor nations to replenish the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, warning that gains made in rolling back the killer diseases risked being reversed due to donor fatigue.

The UN objective of ending epidemics of the three ailments by 2030 remained within reach, he told a two-day donor meeting in the city of Lyon, if countries stepped up to the plate with a sum of \$14-billion.

But with the conference due to wind up in the afternoon, the French president indicated there was a race against the clock to reach the target. Based on pledges so far "we are not there", Macron told delegates.

"The funds that are being asked of us are not... charity. It is a decision to invest against injustice," said the president, highlighting the disproportionate rate of infection and deaths from AIDS, TB and malaria in poor countries, and among women and girls.

"What we want to do is to make AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria disappear from the face of the Earth," he added to applause, and announced that France, the fund's number-two donor, will boost its own contribution

by 15 percent.

"The multilateral system is tired," Macron lamented.

He complained that resolve has weakened in many rich donor countries given that fewer people there are dying of the three diseases and that treatment, particularly for HIV, was readily available.

But they remained rampant in the developing world. "There is a risk of slackening," he said.

The Fund says \$14 billion would help save 16 million lives and avert 234 million new infections.

According to the UN's World Health Organization, 770,000 people died of HIV-related causes last year. Tuberculosis, a high risk for HIV-positive people, claimed some 1.7 million lives in 2017, and malaria more than 430,000.

The meeting is the sixth to replenish the fund since it was set up in 2002, with prominent supporters including Microsoft founder Bill Gates and U2 lead singer Bono in attendance alongside a number of African heads of state.

But officials said collecting such a large sum could prove challenging, especially as global attention moves from AIDS towards fighting climate change.



A group of men from Bangladesh show a placard from a corridor close to the offices of the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) in Cape Town, on Wednesday. Around 250 foreigners, including Bangladeshis, are asking the UNHCR to intervene on their behalf as they say they don't feel safe in South Africa any more, due to high levels of crime as well as xenophobia, and want help in getting home, or to another country. They vowed not to leave the premises until the UNHCR addressed their concerns.

PHOTO: AFP

Police find

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inside. Later, they left," said Abdul Jalil, caretaker of the house.

Soon after, another man, identifying himself as Bayezid's friend who received a text from Bayezid's mobile early yesterday, came, said Jalil.

That man also rang the doorbell and knocked at the door but got no response. Later, he informed Bayezid's relatives of the matter. They came, unlocked the flat with an alternative key and found the bodies.

"Bayezid was in debt. He was forced to shut down his knitting factory for loss," Murad Hossain, brother-in-law of Bayezid, told The Daily Star.

Police went to the flat in Mirpur-13 and found Bayezid's body hanging from the ceiling. The bodies of his wife and son were on the bed, the OC said.

Some empty packets of Biryani were found in the room, the police official said, adding that Bayezid might have fed his wife and son the food after mixing poison and later killed himself.

There were writings on the wall of the room that read "no one is responsible for my death," police said.

Bayezid had a knitting factory in Mirpur, but had to close it for financial loss, locals said.

Kurds fight

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After launching the assault with air strikes and intense artillery fire, the Turkish military and its Syrian proxies crossed the border into Kurdish-controlled areas.

Yesterday, Turkish jets carried out fresh strikes, the Observatory and a Kurdish military official told AFP.

Fighting broke out in several locations along the roughly 120 kilometre (75 mile) wide front where operations are focused, the sources said.

Turkish forces and allied rebels captured seven villages in the area, the Observatory said.

Fighting mostly centred around Tal Abyad -- one of the main Kurdish-controlled towns in the area where Ankara wants to set up a buffer zone stretching some 30 kilometres (20 miles) into Syria.

Clashes also raged around Ras al-Ain further west, the other main town in the zone that Turkish media reports say is the first goal of the offensive.

According to the Observatory, which relies on a network of sources in Syria, at least 23 SDF fighters and nine civilians have been killed since the start of Turkey's operation.

On the other side of the border, five people including a baby were reported to have been killed and dozens injured in Kurdish shelling on Turkish border towns.

AFP correspondents saw fighters crossing into Syria in dozens of vehicles.

Turkey, which has carried out two previous cross-border offensives into Syria since the start of the conflict, relies heavily on Syrian proxies for ground operations.

The Syrian fighters -- most of them grouped under the banner of an outfit that calls itself the Syrian National Army -- are mostly Sunni Arab former rebels who were defeated by the Damascus regime.

Erdogan, who is politically embattled at home, wants a buffer zone in which to send back some of the 3.6 million Syrian refugees his country hosts.

He warned the European Union on Thursday that the alternative if it criticised Turkey's military offensive was to allow the refugees to head to its shores instead.

One in three graduates unemployed

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among graduates raises concerns about the job readiness and relevance of skills that tertiary educational institution in Bangladesh impart to their students," the WB said.

Labour market surveys have consistently demonstrated that employers struggle to fill job vacancies for highly-skilled positions such as professionals, technicians and managers: around 69 percent of employers reported a shortage of skilled applicants for professional positions.

Employers in Bangladesh are seeking higher-order cognitive skills and soft skills, the report said.

They rank three higher-order cognitive and soft skills as most relevant for current work environment: problem-solving and independent thinking; work attitude; and positive personality.

"However, they struggle to find graduates with these skills."

Around 80 percent of the employers of polytechnic graduates reported that problem-solving skills is a key area where polytechnics need to train students better.

Similarly, employers would like universities and colleges to strengthen

skills training on information and communication technology, English and higher-order thinking such as communication, problem-solving and team work.

"Scarcity of qualified employees has resulted in higher pay for jobs requiring these skills in Bangladesh. To address this shortage, academic programs should be improved," the WB said.

Meanwhile, employed tertiary graduates generally earn reasonable salaries, with university and male graduates faring better.

Most tertiary graduates make at least Tk 11,000 per month (\$138) within one or two years after graduation. This level of income is comparable to the average national monthly earnings.

However, the return on qualification is not uniform.

University graduates earn significantly more than graduates from colleges or polytechnics. On average, their earnings are three times as high as that of tertiary college or polytechnic graduates.

A university graduate earns on average around Tk 29,932 per month (\$375) with no significant gender wage gap.

On the other hand, gender wage gaps are significant among

employed graduates from college and polytechnics, especially among those who are not full-time permanent employees.

To bridge the demand and supply gap, investments in skills training, equitable access for female and poor students, public funding mechanisms to develop market-relevant skills and an effective regulatory and accountability framework are needed, said Bernard Haven, senior economist of the WB and co-author of the report.

As Bangladesh moves towards upper middle-income status skills upgradation will become important, said Mercy Miyan Tembon, country director of the WB.

"To achieve its growth vision, Bangladesh will need a high-productivity economy."

Human capital development that is responsive to labour market demand for higher-level skills and to rapid technological advancements will be crucial, she added.

"To address these challenges, we need to work together on a reform agenda covering accreditation, competency framework, institutional development and financing strategies in partnership with major industries," she added.

3D printer makes meat

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"It's one small nibble for man, one giant bite for mankind," said Yusef Khesuani of 3D Bioprinting Solutions, the Russian laboratory that created the bioprinter.

The laboratory was founded by Invitro, a large Russian private medicine company.

The Roscosmos space agency part-financed the experiment as of national importance.

"It was really a breakthrough both for Roscosmos and Russia as a whole," said Nikolai Burdeiny, executive director of the state space corporation, which includes Roscosmos.

"For us it was the first experience of international scientific collaboration in space," Khesuani said, using cells provided by Israeli and US food-tech companies.

"Thank God the experiment went successfully... All the cells showed a good result in space," he added.

Astronauts eat meat on board that is vacuum-packed or dried on Earth but this technology could ultimately be necessary for long voyages into deep space, said veteran cosmonaut

Oleg Kononenko.

"If we're going to fly further from Earth to other planets in the solar system, we can't take that volume of food with us," he told AFP.

"In any case we will have to grow and produce food onboard the spaceship."

"I think progress is developing very quickly, science and knowledge, and I think this will be within our lifetimes," he said.

Creating larger amounts of meat in the Russian segment will need more complex equipment than the current printer, said Khesuani.

"Then we can create not just small objects but big ones, made of a large mass of cells."

"I hope we will continue these experiments."

Other space agencies are also carrying out experiments in this area as making human tissue in space is easier than in conditions of gravity.

An American 3D printer launched to the station in July can manufacture human tissue and is also being used for experiments by the European Space Agency.

Tokarczuk, Handke win

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problems in our part of the world, and we still have something to say to the world," she said.

Tokarczuk's books portray a polychromatic world perpetually in motion, with characters' traits intermingled and language that is both precise and poetic.

Her first novel, "The Journey of the People of the Book," released in 1993, chronicles a failed expedition to find a mysterious book.

The daughter of a school librarian, she won the Booker International Prize along with her translator Jennifer Croft for her 2007 novel "Flights", whose English version came out in 2017.

Her 900-page "The Books of Jacob", which the Swedish Academy hailed as her "magnum opus", spans seven countries, three religions and five languages, tracing the little-known history of Frankism, a Jewish messianic sect that sprang up in Poland in the 18th century.

Released in 2014, its pages are numbered in reverse in the style of Hebrew books.

The Academy called it a "remarkably rich panorama of an almost neglected chapter in European history."

HANDKE CONTROVERSY
Handke meanwhile was honoured "for an influential work that with linguistic ingenuity has explored the periphery and the specificity of human experience," the Academy said.

Ironically, in 2014 Handke called

for the Nobel Literature Prize to be abolished, saying it brought its winner "false canonisation".

The son of a German soldier he only met in adulthood, Handke "has established himself as one of the most influential writers in Europe after the Second World War," the Academy said.

His works are filled with a strong desire to discover and to make his discoveries come to life by finding new literary expressions for them, it added.

Notable works include "Short Letter, Long Farewell", the poetry collection "The Innerworld of the Outerworld of the Innerworld" and "A Sorrow Beyond Dreams" about his mother, who killed herself in 1971.

Handke stoked controversy when he attended former Serbian president Slobodan Milosevic's funeral in 2006, and expressed sympathy for the Serbs in the 1990s Yugoslav wars.

He has also described Thomas Mann, a giant of German literature and a 1929 Nobel laureate, as a "terribly bad writer" churning out "condescending, snotty-nosed prose".

Tokarczuk and Handke -- who both told the Academy they would attend the prize ceremony in Stockholm on December 10 -- will each take home a cheque worth nine million kronor (\$912,000, \$28,000 euros).

Tokarczuk becomes just the 15th woman to have won the prestigious distinction, out of 116 literature laureates honoured since 1901.

ACADEMY ROCKED BY SCANDAL

Dating back to 1786, the Swedish Academy was shaken by a scandal that saw Frenchman Jean-Claude Arnault, who has close ties to the institution, jailed for rape in 2018.

The Academy was torn apart as its 18 members vehemently disagreed on how to manage their ties to him.

The rift exposed scheming, conflicts of interest, harassment and a culture of silence among its members, long esteemed as the country's guardians of culture.

Arnault is married to Katarina Frostenson, a member of the Academy who later resigned over the scandal at the height of the #MeToo movement against harassment of women.

The pair also ran a cultural club in Stockholm that received funding from the body.

Ultimately, seven members quit the Academy. In tatters, it postponed the 2018 prize until this year -- the first delay in 70 years.

"From having been associated with literature of the highest order, the Nobel Prize is for many now associated with #MeToo... and a dysfunctional organisation," Swedish literary critic Madelaine Levy told AFP.

The Academy has in the past year been revamped with new members and statutes.

"The changes have been very productive and we are hopeful for the future," the new permanent secretary, Mats Malm, told AFP in an interview just days before the prize announcement.

Malaysia finds hornbill 'ivory' in massive wildlife seizure

AFP, Kuala Lumpur

Almost 800 animal parts including a huge stash of hornbill "ivory", pangolin scales and deer's antlers, have been seized in a raid on Borneo island, officials in Malaysia said yesterday.

Borneo's vast jungles are home to a kaleidoscope of rare creatures but they are frequently targeted by poachers who sell their parts to collectors and for use in traditional medicine, particularly in China.

The island is shared between

Malaysia, Indonesia and Brunei.

Officials uncovered the huge haul on Saturday in a raid on a house in Kapit in Malaysia's Sarawak state, and a 56-year-old man was arrested, senior forestry official Zolkipli Mohamad Aton told AFP.

It included 148 helmet-like blocks of reddish keratin that is found on the front of the skulls of colourful hornbill birds.

Although it is different to ivory from elephant tusks, the material is commonly known as hornbill "ivory" and is in growing demand in

China, where it is carved into luxury ornaments, statues and jewellery.

The rest of the stash included hornbill feathers, scales from pangolins -- known as "scaly anteaters" -- peacock feathers, porcupine quills, and deer antlers, Zolkipli said, adding it was the biggest such seizure in Sarawak for 16 years.

He said the suspect could be a supplier of animal parts to syndicates exporting them to markets such as China, Hong Kong and Vietnam, and was facing jail for breaking wildlife protection laws.

Facebook post causes

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sent a letter to Baharul on Wednesday, regarding his suspension and the show-cause order.

According to the letter, an emergency meeting was held at Khulna district AL office on Wednesday where it was said that Bahrul's Facebook post goes against AL, chief of the party, and the country.

Baharul posted the status on October 6 with the title: "It is called an India-Bangladesh bilateral agreement, but in reality it is a unilateral decision -- the interests of the people of Bangladesh are utterly neglected."

The 247-word post in Bangla was published in a local daily, Somoyer Khobor, the next day.

Asked about the decision, Farid Ahmed said a joint meeting was held at the party office on Wednesday night. "Some leaders raised the issue of Baharul Alam there. Later, the district Awami League called an emergency meeting and suspended him."

Talking to The Daily Star yesterday noon, Baharul said he did not receive any formal document or letter till now.

He said, "I didn't write anything about the AL or my party in my post. I criticised it from my personal viewpoint that India is ignoring the interests of the people of Bangladesh."

He also said, "There is not a single word against PM or AL in my Facebook post. So how will party discipline be violated?"

Dr Baharul is the vice-president of central committee of Bangladesh Medical Association (BMA), president of Khulna chapter of BMA, central vice-president of Independent Medical Council, and president of Ekattorer Ghatok Dalal Nirmul Committee. He is also associated with various civil society groups in Khulna.

Baharul said the party unit took the decision without taking his statement. He said he wonders how party rules were violated by his post. "This action was taken against me as a revenge and out of a long-running factional dispute," he said.

"I think as a citizen, as an Awami League activist, as a freedom fighter, I want to protect the interest of my country. As a supporter of the Awami League, will I not criticise America, Myanmar or India?"

Sheikh Harunur Rashid, president of the district AL, said Baharul criticised the decision of the party's high command. "Why did he (Baharul) react when none did it?" He said if Baharul had anything

to say he could discuss it with party colleagues.

Harunur Rashid also said, "It is not like that I took the action against him. The decision came from 16 executive committee members of the district Awami League. If he wants to say that it was out of factional feud, then I have nothing to say."

The emergency meeting was also attended by Acting General Secretary Sujit Adhikari, Vice President Molla Jalal Uddin, Organising Secretary Md Akhteruzzaman Babu, Relief Affairs Secretary Nimai Chandra Roy, Office Secretary Farid Ahmed, Education Secretary Prof Mizanur Rahman, Women Affairs Secretary Halima Islam, Deputy Secretary Shah Alam, and Executive Members Md Kamruzzaman Jamal, Kazi Badsha Mia, Ghazi Mohammad Ali, BMA Salam, Rabindra Nath Mandal, and Prof Ashraf Alurum Jumum.

Don't waste water

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The PM also said her government, assuming power in 2009, took a comprehensive plan for Dwsa to bring radical changes in water supply.

Now, Dwsa has the capacity to supply surplus water against the demand, she said.

Hasina said her government is now ensuring safe water for other divisional cities, while taking measures to ensure safe water for district and upazila towns across the country.

She added that the government's goal is to ensure safe water even at the union level and is working to ensure safe water across the country.

Hasina said the government is working to extend urban facilities to villages and has also already taken measures to address river pollution.

"The government is now evicting all illegal structures from river banks and enhancing the navigability and water reserve capacity of each river by dredging them," she said.

Hasina said the government has taken measures to give importance to the use of surface water in irrigation, reducing dependency on underground water.

Local Government Division Secretary Helal Uddin Ahmed, Chinese Ambassador to Bangladesh Li Jiming, South Korean Ambassador to Bangladesh Hu Kang-il, Asian Development Bank Country Director Manmohan Parkash and Dwsa Managing Director Taqsem A Khan also spoke on the occasion.