

UN calls for greater heat protection for workers in Qatar

Improved safeguards and working hours are needed to protect labourers in Qatar from the effects of heat and humidity, the United Nations said Friday, as it published new research.

The desert monarchy has come under fire for conditions faced by its hundreds of thousands of migrant workers, as it prepares to host the 2022 World Cup.

The risks of Qatar's heat and humidity were again thrust into the spotlight at the recent World Athletics Championships in Doha when women's marathon runners collapsed because of the conditions, despite the race being staged at midnight.

Humidity hovered around 73 percent and the temperature was 33 degrees Celsius (91 degrees Fahrenheit) for much of last month's race.

The study, commissioned by the International Labour Organization (ILO) and Qatar's labour ministry, praised measures taken to reduce the effects of heat on 4,000 workers at one World Cup stadium project.

It concluded that while the heat mitigation steps taken by the body responsible for delivering the football showcase were "moderately to highly acceptable", other employers in Qatar could improve protections.

Of Qatar's roughly 1.9 million workers, just 30,000 work directly on World Cup projects.

The head of the UN agency's Qatar project office, Houtan Homayounpour, said the project was working with the government to turn the study's recommendations into "improved legislation".

Workers need to be able to set their own pace, he told AFP, in terms of "when to stop, when to have a break, when to drink water -- it's very important... They know best how they feel."

"We'll be promoting this very hard across the country in collaboration with the Ministry of Labour."

Homayounpour said the research also indicated a need to extend the

ban on work during the hottest hours of the day, as well as the period of the year to which it applies.

The law currently states that work on exposed sites must stop between 11:30 am and 3:00 pm between June and August.

Researchers from the University of Thessaly in Greece reviewed more than 5,500 hours of work as part of their research, the largest ever study of its kind and the first in the region.

The study tracked environmental conditions over summer this year and the physiological responses of 125 workers subjected to different heat mitigation strategies.

It compared practises at the under-construction 40,000-capacity Al-Rayyan stadium west of Doha with a rural farm, looking at the impact of hydration, work-rest ratios and clothing on heat strain.

- 'Leading the region' -

Workers on the stadium project, run by the Supreme Committee organising the World Cup, mitigated conditions through frequent breaks as well as access to shade and water, according to the study.

The researchers recommended companies in Qatar introduce heat stress alleviation plans and annual health check-ups as well as adjusting summertime working hours and empowering employees to take responsibility for their welfare.

Projects run by Qatar's Supreme Committee are acknowledged by human rights groups to generally offer their workers better protections and rights than schemes not under the supervision of the World Cup organisers.

On Thursday, Human Rights Watch called on Qatar to "thoroughly and urgently investigate" worker deaths following publication of research linking cardiovascular fatalities in the country to heatstroke.

The study, published by Cardiology Journal in July, probed the "relationship between deaths of more than 1,300 Nepali workers between 2009 and 2017 and heat exposure", according to HRW.



Pro-Turkish Syrian fighters cross the border into Syria as they take part in an offensive against Kurdish-controlled areas in northeastern Syria launched by the Turkish military yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

Turkey intensifies Syria campaign

FROM PAGE 16

did not back him.

Yesterday, Turkish warplanes and artillery struck around Syria's Ras al Ain, one of two border towns that have been the focus of the offensive. Reuters journalists heard gunfire there from across the frontier in the Turkish town of Ceylanpinar.

A convoy of 20 armoured vehicles carrying Turkish-allied Syrian rebels entered Syria from Ceylanpinar. Some made victory signs, shouting "Allahu akbar" (God is greatest) and waving Syrian rebel flags as they advanced towards Ras al Ain.

Some 120 km (75 miles) to the west, Turkish howitzers resumed shelling near the Syrian town of Tel Abyad, a witness said.

"In these moments, Tel Abyad is seeing the most intense battles in three days," Marvan Qamishlo, a spokesman for the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) said.

Overnight, clashes erupted at different points along the border from Ain Diwar at the Iraqi frontier to Kobani, more than 400 km to the west. Turkish and SDF forces exchanged shelling in Qamishli among other places, the SDF's Qamishlo said.

"The whole border was on fire," he said.

Turkish forces have seized nine villages near Ras al Ain and Tel Abyad, said Rami Abdulrahman, director of the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, which monitors the war.

At least 32 fighters with the SDF and 34 Turkey-backed Syrian rebels have been killed in fighting, while 10 civilians have been killed, Abdulrahman said. The SDF said 22 of its fighters were killed on Wednesday and Thursday.

Turkey says it has killed hundreds of SDF fighters in the operation and one Turkish soldier has been killed.

Turkey says the purpose of its assault is to defeat the Kurdish YPG militia, which it sees as an enemy for its links to insurgents in Turkey. It says it aims to set up a "safe zone" inside Syria, where it can resettle many of the 3.6 million refugees it has been hosting.

The International Rescue Committee aid group says 64,000 people in Syria have fled in the first days of the campaign.

The Kurdish YPG is the main fighting element of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) which have acted as the principal allies

of the United States in a campaign that recaptured territory held by the Islamic State group.

The SDF now holds most of the territory that once made up Islamic State's "caliphate" in Syria, and has been keeping thousands of Islamic State fighters in jail and tens of thousands of their family members in camps.

A camp sheltering more than 7,000 displaced people in northern Syria is to be evacuated and there are talks on moving a second camp for 13,000 people including Islamic State fighters' families, after both were shelled, Kurdish-led authorities said.

Medecins Sans Frontieres said a hospital in Tel Abyad had been forced to shut after most of its staff fled from bombings over the past 24 hours.

Western countries' rejection of the Turkish offensive creates a rift within the Nato alliance, in which Turkey is the main Muslim member.

Nato Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg said after talks with Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu in Istanbul that he expected Turkey to act with restraint in Syria. Cavusoglu said Ankara expected "strong solidarity" from the alliance.

South Africa ex-leader Zuma to face graft trial

AFP, Pietermaritzburg

South Africa's scandal-plagued former president Jacob Zuma will face a corruption trial, a court ruled yesterday, in one of multiple alleged graft cases over his long political career.

The country's High Court unanimously dismissed Zuma's bid for a permanent stay of prosecution over 16 counts of fraud, racketeering and money laundering relating to a multi-billion-dollar arms deal dating back to before he took office in 2009.

Zuma, who has been accused of taking bribes from French defence company Thales, sought in March to have the case dropped.

He maintained the case was politically-motivated and years of delay would result in an unfair trial.

But the trial is now scheduled to begin on Tuesday after High Court Judge Willie Seriti ruled that Zuma's "application for the permanent stay is dismissed with costs".

Modi, Xi look to patch up

FROM PAGE 16

had stayed silent over the current upheaval in Hong Kong.

"Frankly, the optics surrounding this visit don't look very promising at the moment," Harsh Pant, an international relations professor at King's College London, told AFP.

China's backing of Pakistan "has left a very bad taste in India's mouth", Pant said.

DINNER AND DANCE

India and China -- home to more than a third of humanity -- have never been the best of friends, going to war in 1962 and engaging in a series of Himalayan standoffs since.

The Dalai Lama, the Tibetan spiritual leader and long a thorn in China's side, has been allowed to live in and travel the world from his base Dharamsala in northern India since 1959.

In 2017 Delhi and Beijing staged an alarming two-month face-off on the Doklam plateau -- claimed by China and Bhutan -- when Chinese troops started building a road and India sent

its forces to halt them.

However, the following year Xi and Modi patched things up in China's Wuhan. Their latest meeting, over elaborate meals and dance performances in Mahabalipuram, is aimed at building on that.

The key free-wheeling one-on-one meeting between Xi and Modi will take place this morning. The two leaders will have six hours of one-on-one talks and separate statements will be issued, government sources said.

Mahabalipuram -- home to historical monuments that pay testament to India and China's ancient ties -- has seen more than 40 Tibetans, including a prominent activist, reportedly detained ahead of the summit.

But since Wuhan other irritants have emerged, including a reported "scuffle" in Ladakh last month and Indian military activities in the northern Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh, part of which Beijing claims.

India and Washington, seeking with

others to counter China's growing regional assertiveness, have deepened military cooperation and India has moved closer to the Quad security dialogue with Japan, the United States and Australia.

On commerce India and China -- both facing a protectionist America -- want greater access to each other's markets, with India currently importing from China far more than it exports there.

Beijing also wants Delhi to ignore Western cyber-security concerns on Huawei -- already a big player in the India mobile sector -- and allow the telecoms firm to be part of 5G trials.

Huawei's "contribution to India's economic and social development is obvious to all," China's foreign ministry said this week, hoping Delhi would make "independent and objective judgments and decisions".

Xi will head to Nepal today, the first Chinese president to visit the buffer state between India and China in 22 years.

4 Ansar al Islam men

FROM PAGE 16

members of Ansar al Islam".

"The four along with some other operatives from different districts received one month's training in Bandarban followed by a week-long training in the Sundarbans area.

"They recently gathered in the capital to carry out an act of sabotage as part of their organisational plan," Monirul told a press briefing at the DMP's Media Centre yesterday.

He said the militants used to carry out their activities in the hilly area in the guise of running a coffee shop. They communicated with each other by using different social media platforms, including the Facebook Messenger.

The CTC chief said Ansar al Islam operatives usually stab their targeted victims to death and carry arms only to ensure that they can escape easily after carrying out attacks.

Officials said Shahin, student of a South Korean university, opened a Facebook group with like-minded youths and later joined the militant outfit.

UK to send

FROM PAGE 16

US, Russia and China. A recent attempt by a private Israeli company ended in disaster when the lander crashed on the surface.

Unveiled during the New Scientist Live event at London's ExCel, the robot was designed by UK start-up space company SpaceBit.

SpaceBit founder Pavlo Tanasyuk said: "Our goal is to go there and see what is available there for all humanity to explore."

He added that, unlike rovers with wheels or tracks, this robot with four legs would provide an opportunity for "something a little bit like a human" to explore the lunar surface.

In May, Nasa announced that Astrobotic and two other companies had been awarded funding to build lunar landers.

Astrobotic was awarded millions of dollars to carry up to 14 Nasa instruments to the moon as well as 14 payloads from other partners.

SpaceBit will be one of those partners, sending the rover to the surface inside Astrobotic's Peregrine lander.

It is expected to land near the region of Mare Serenitatis -- the Sea of Serenity -- in June or July 2021.

Once the lander reaches the moon, the 1.5kg (3lb 5oz) rover will drop from beneath it to the surface along with other payloads.

It will scuttle across the surface taking measurements and collecting exploration data. The rover is battery-powered, but a small solar panel will also harness energy from the sun.

It also has two cameras that will enable it to take "robot selfies", SpaceBit said.

The reason for the legs is to allow the robot to enter lava tubes in future missions, which has not been possible before.

Ukrainian-born Tanasyuk said: "After we land, we will be exploring the moon surface, and hopefully we will be able to get into the lava tubes and explore the environment there."

"So we hope to find a stable temperature which will be suited for future human missions to the moon."

"It is a rugged environment in the lava tubes so you can't really use wheels there -- that was why we had to design these legs instead of wheels."

The SpaceBit rover can withstand temperatures from up to 130C (266F) to minus 130C (minus 202F) at night, and will explore for the duration of a lunar day.

120 homes lost

FROM PAGE 16

"We had been demanding for a permanent embankment in our area for long, but the authorities did not pay heed to it," said Fatema Begum of Kalihati upazila's Beltia village who lost her house in the erosion and was leaving under the open sky.

Talking to The Daily Star, many more locals of the upazila echoed Fatema's statement.

Asked, WDB official Sarajul said they had a plan to construct a permanent embankment in the area during the next dry season.

"We are preparing CC blocks which will be set on a 600-metre area," he said.

The authorities started dumping geo-bags in the area to prevent further erosion, he added.

Visiting the area yesterday, Tangail Deputy Commissioner Md Shohidul Islam said the district administration would make a list of the victims and provide them with necessary aid.

Tangail-4 (Kalihati) MP Hasan Imam Khan said the government would provide Tk 6,000 and some other assistance to each affected family.

On the other hand, several villages in Bhupur upazila were badly affected by the river erosion.

The Jamuna was posing a threat to at least two government primary schools, three mosques, a temple and vast croplands in the upazila, said locals.

Earlier in July, around 300 homesteads and vast croplands were devoured by the river in the upazila.

Ethiopia PM

FROM PAGE 1

violence ahead of a parliamentary election in May 2020.

"I was so humbled and thrilled when I just heard the news," Abiy told the Nobel Committee in a phone call posted online on the Nobel Prize website.

"It is a prize given to Africa, given to Ethiopia."

Abiy also said he hoped it would inspire other African leaders to "think it possible to work on peace-building processes".

Since taking office in April 2018, the 43-year-old has aggressively pursued policies that have the potential to upend society in the Horn of Africa nation and reshape dynamics beyond its borders, after years of civil unrest.

On July 9, 2018, following a historic meeting in Eritrea's capital Asmara, Abiy and Eritrean President Isaias Afwerki formally ended a 20-year-old stalemate between the countries in the wake of the 1998-2000 border conflict.

Abiy swiftly released dissidents from jail, apologised for state brutality, and welcomed home exiled armed groups.

'WINDS OF HOPE'

His actions have sparked optimism in a region of Africa marred by violence. "I have said often that winds of hope are blowing ever stronger across Africa. Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed is one of the main reasons why," UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres said.

The peace agreement with Eritrea has "opened up new opportunities for the region to enjoy security and stability," and Abiy's "leadership has

set a wonderful example for others in and beyond Africa looking to overcome resistance from the past and put people first."

The Nobel jury stressed that the Peace Prize was "also meant to recognise all the stakeholders working for peace and reconciliation in Ethiopia and in the East and Northeast African regions."

It singled out the Eritrean leader for praise, noting that "peace does not arise from the actions of one party alone."

"When Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed reached out his hand, President Afwerki grabbed it, and helped to formalise the peace process between the two countries."

However, analysts believe there is still some way to go before a lasting peace, and the enthusiasm has been mixed with frustration.

The border between the two countries has once again been closed, the countries still lack trade agreements and Ethiopia -- a land-locked country -- still has no access to Eritrean ports.

And last June, Abiy faced the greatest threat yet to his hold on power when gunmen assassinated high-ranking officials including a prominent regional president and the army chief.

Amnesty International said the prize should spur Abiy to enhance reforms on human rights.

"This award should push and motivate him to tackle the outstanding human rights challenges that threaten to reverse the gains made so far," the group said, pointing to "ongoing ethnic tensions that threaten instability

and further human rights abuses".

Ethnic violence has been on the rise in recent years, causing Ethiopia to record more internally displaced people last year than any other country.

PUSH IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION

Recognising that some would consider the prize premature, the Nobel Committee said that while much remained to be done, the award should serve as encouragement, and pointed to the criteria set by prize creator Alfred Nobel -- namely that the award should go to one "who has made the most significant contribution to peace within the past year".

"We are confident that by far this is Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed, and we are also hopeful that the peace prize could perhaps be a push on the peace initiatives in the right direction," Berit Reiss-Andersen, chair of the Norwegian Nobel Committee, told AFP.

The committee had to choose from more than 300 nominations this year.

Online betting sites had put Swedish climate activist Greta Thunberg -- who has already received Amnesty's top honour and the Right Livelihood Award, sometimes dubbed the "alternative Nobel" -- as the one to beat.

This year's prize will be presented at a ceremony in Oslo on December 10, the anniversary of the 1896 death of Alfred Nobel, who was a Swedish philanthropist and scientist.

The award consists of a gold medal, a diploma, and nine million Swedish kronor (around \$912,000 or \$28,000 euros).

Migrant workers

FROM PAGE 2

barangas -- built out of salvaged plastic sheets, cardboard and reeds. They offer no running water, electricity or sanitation facilities.

"These structures are human tragedies waiting to happen. The danger of the inflammable construction material is heightened with cooking done inside in crude partitioned kitchens, with propane gas cylinders, and lighting provided by candles," the researcher added.

In June 2018, a massive fire broke out in a migrant settlement in Nea Manolada. More than 340 Bangladeshi workers lose everything they had, including identification papers, passports, work permits, proof of stay and saved wages.

In 2019, seven fires, fueled by strong winds, charred entire sets of Barangas in the same region in a matter of minutes. So far, no one has died, but the migrants worry about what might happen if a fire breaks out at night, when everyone is sleeping. Blazes in similar migrant housing have resulted in fatalities, the article said.

Kukreja wrote there's no electricity, no fans or heaters in the housing facilities. The workers are also unable to charge their cell phones, a vital link to their families. The only place to charge phones is at ethnic grocery stores or cafes with long queues to do so.

The inadequate sanitation, waste-disposal facilities and drainage create ripe conditions for infectious diseases. Frequent diarrhoea, fever, asthma

and respiratory problems appear widespread, the researcher said.

The workers are deterred from demanding better living conditions because they are undocumented. The ever-present threat of potential deportation scares undocumented migrant workers who then discipline themselves as efficient but invisible workers.

Local authorities, aware of their plight, have turned a blind eye to improving migrant housing, leaving the men with little recourse.

"Everyone exploits our desperation to earn wages while profiting from our labour," said a labourer in his mid-30s who has been working in the farms for the last seven years.

Mothers

FROM PAGE 16

exams, the teachers believe.

Rahid Ali's mother, Rima Begum who has been attending classes with her son, said the boy has better concentration now.

Rini Begum, another mother from Poladanga area, said her son's absenteeism has been reduced recently.

Head Teacher Monowara said most of the students are from poor families and the mothers do not have much education. "But their presence and engagement help a lot."

Tasemuddin, assistant upazila education officer, said, "We are proud of this school for taking this step. It has been possible because of the inventiveness of teachers."