

## Ebola still an 'urgent' global health emergency: WHO

AFP, Geneva

The deadly Ebola epidemic in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) remains an "urgent" global health emergency, The World Health Organization (WHO) said Friday at its Emergency Committee meeting.

DRC's latest Ebola epidemic, which began in August 2018, has killed 2,144 people, making it the second deadliest outbreak of the virus, after the West Africa pandemic of 2014-2016.

"The public health emergency will be maintained for an additional three months", WHO director-general Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said at a press conference.

"This outbreak remains a complex and dangerous outbreak," he said, deploring the lack of funding.

The status of a global health emergency is an exceptional measure that has been used by the WHO four times: in 2009 for the Swine flu virus, in 2014 for polio, in 2014 for the Ebola epidemic which killed more than 11,000 in Liberia, Guinea, Sierra Leone and in 2016 for the Zika virus.

Last week, the director of the WHO Emergency Program, Michael Ryan, expressed "cautious optimism" that the epidemic was confined to a smaller region.

The DRC health ministry said earlier this week Ebola had returned to Ituri province in the north-east of the country after nearly 300 days without any new cases.

"The number of cases has declined each week for the past four weeks. But these encouraging trends should be interpreted with caution," Adhanom Ghebreyesus said.

"The area is a very complex area, it's a very volatile area. We have made very significant progress, the number of cases has plummeted.

"But if there is insecurity incidents, we may lose what we have gained so far."

## S Sudan rebel leader in Juba for talks as peace deal falters

AFP, Juba

South Sudan's exiled rebel leader Riek Machar arrived in Juba on Saturday in a bid to salvage a peace deal with less than a month to go until he is to form a government with President Salva Kiir.

The foes, whose falling out in 2013 triggered a bloody civil war that has left almost 400,000 people dead and sparked a major humanitarian crisis, signed a peace deal in September last year that is meant to see them reunite once again in government.

The deadline for the formation of this government, in which Machar will serve as first vice president, has already been delayed once and is now set for November 12.

However crucial technical steps contained within the agreement, such as creating a unified army and agreeing on the internal boundaries of states, have failed to make progress.

"The two will have a closed door meeting at the presidential palace today (Saturday)," a spokesman for Machar's party the SPLM-IO, Manawa Peter Gatkuot, said after the rebel leader's arrival.

## Catalan leaders

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non-starter for Madrid, is up for discussion.

The Spanish government responded by saying it had "always been open to dialogue in the framework of respect for the law".

In a statement, it also called on Torra to condemn the violence, "which he has not done so far".

Barcelona has been rocked all week by protests against a Spanish court's jailing of nine separatist leaders on sedition charges over a failed independence bid.

Emergency services said Saturday that 152 people were injured in overnight clashes in Barcelona, and dozens more hurt elsewhere in Catalonia, taking the total to 182.

Authorities had already reported 500 injured since protests started Monday even before the latest clashes erupted.

The interior ministry said 83 people were detained in the overnight violence, in addition to 128 arrests police had reported previously.

"This can't go on, Barcelona does not deserve this," said Ada Colau, the city's leftist mayor on Saturday, condemning "all kinds of violence".

## Charge-sheet

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ministry, Asaduzzaman said all institutions under the home ministry including police, Border Guard Bangladesh, Coast Guard, Rapid Action Battalion, Ansar Battalion and others are being recast to make the effort successful.



Mourners attend the funeral of civilians and fighters, who died during attacks by Turkish-led forces on the border town of Ras al-Ain, in a cemetery in Tal Tamr, near the Syrian Kurdish town of Ras al-Ain, yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

## Ancient 'lost city' found in Cambodia

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landmines installed by the Khmer Rouge regime in the 1970s.

Shrouded in mystery for decades, Mahendraparvata has been dubbed the "lost city." Now, scientists say they have identified it for certain.

"Here, we confirm the hypothesis, based on this accumulated body of evidence, that Mahendraparvata -- the eighth- to ninth-century AD capital of the Khmer Empire -- was located on the Phnom Kulen massif," said the report, which was published in the journal *Antiquity*.

The researchers used airborne laser scanning that had a "unique ability to 'see through' vegetation and provide high-resolution models of the forest floor," the report said.

They had to map the area in two separate operations -- first in 2012, covering about 37 square kilometers

(about 9,143 acres), and again in 2015, covering the entire mountain range, an area of 975 square kilometers (240,928 acres).

The results of the aerial mapping, along with information collected by field investigations, were then used to create a map that shows the newly discovered main paths and coordinate axes. The map details the location of features like an unfinished reservoir, several dams, the enclosure walls of temples, and even a palace.

These discoveries open the door to learning more about the Khmer Empire and the Angkor region. The map shows that the city used urban planning, a "sophisticated hydraulic system," and other innovations, the report said.

One striking discovery was that the city was built on linear axes that roughly correspond with the cardinal

directions, the report said -- like an early version of the modern city grid system.

Prior to that period of time, human settlements in the area had no formal grid, no clear boundaries, and seem to have developed organically without planning -- meaning Mahendraparvata is the first known large grid city in the Khmer world.

"The work described here effectively draws to a close 150 years of archaeological mapping work in the Greater Angkor region and sets the stage for more sophisticated spatio-temporal modelling of urban form," the report said.

Angkor was the better-known capital of the Khmer Empire, which once governed much of modern-day Thailand, Vietnam, and Laos as well as parts of southern China and Myanmar, and, of course, Cambodia itself.

## Syria truce takes hold

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southern border by establishing a 30 kilometre (20 mile) deep "safe zone" on the Syrian side of the frontier.

A Britain-based war monitor said the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) had yet to start pulling back yesterday.

"The SDF have not withdrawn until now for any point," the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said.

SDF commander Redur Khalil said deadly bombardments by Turkey's forces on Friday were a major breach of the truce and called on Washington to ensure Ankara honoured its side of the deal.

On Friday, Turkish air strikes and mortar fire by allied Syrian fighters killed 14 civilians in and around the village of Bab al-Kheir, the Observatory said.

The Turkish military and its Syrian proxies -- mostly Arab and Turkmen

former rebels used as a ground force -- have so far seized around 120 kilometres (70 miles) of territory along the Syrian-Turkish border.

Syria's Kurds had been a key partner in the US-backed battle against the Islamic State group in Syria, overrunning the last remnant of their self-proclaimed "caliphate" in March.

But earlier this month, US President Donald Trump announced he would withdraw US troops from northern Syria, in a move that was seen as green-lighting a Turkish attack.

The move has come under widespread criticism, even from within Trump's own Republican party.

It has sparked concerns that thousands of IS suspects and their family members in Kurdish custody could break out and bring about a resurgence of the extremist group.

US Senate majority leader Mitch McConnell called Trump's decision "a

strategic nightmare".

"Withdrawing US forces from Syria is a grave strategic mistake," McConnell wrote in *The Washington Post*.

"It will leave the American people and homeland less safe, embolden our enemies, and weaken important alliances."

US Vice President Mike Pence brokered the ceasefire deal on a visit to Turkey this week.

US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, who accompanied Pence to Ankara, said in an interview with Politico he was "confident" the ceasefire would take hold.

The suspension of hostilities looked designed to help Turkey achieve its main territorial goals without fighting.

But Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan warned the same day that he would resume a full-out offensive if Kurdish forces did not pull back.

## Choking a stream to death

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only about 5 feet.

During a recent visit, this correspondent found multiple structures erected on banks of the stream. Some of the structures were seven to eight years old while others 15 to 16 years.

Experts said these structures changed the course of the water flow and it resulted into floods that hit hard the town during monsoons.

Encroachment, littering, and the authorities' decision to lease out the land were largely responsible for blockage of the flow, locals told this correspondent.

"We have seen how mindlessly they destroyed this water body in a tourist town like Bandarban. But we can't do anything about it," said Buddhajoyti Chakma, a local journalist. "The illegal structures must be removed to save the stream."

Mong Swe Khai Marma, an executive engineer of Bandarban municipality, said, "We are helpless. The encroachers have political links and are erecting permanent structures on the banks."

"The main reason why waterlogging has been frequent in recent years is nothing but filling up of the waterbody."

According to local Mayor Islam Baby, Bandarban Hill District Council Chairman Kwe Shwe Hla, who has been in-charge of a Bazar Fund for the last 12 years, leased out areas near the stream to ruling party men.

Bazar Fund is a self-earning administration in hill districts. It was created under CHT regulation 1900 and is regulated by Bazar Fund Manual.

When contacted, Kwe Shwe Hla said, "We allocated the plots in line to the Bazar Fund Manual Act. But those who were given the plots are illegally occupying land on the banks of the stream."

The district administration did violate the conditions of the Bazar fund lease agreement in this case, he

stressed.

"We gave on lease 1.86-acre land to district administration in 2009 for constructing an officers' club but violating the conditions, they leased out the land to other influential people in 2012," Shwe Hla added.

The National River Conservation Commission (NRCC) recently published 368 names of water body grabbers in Bandarban where there is no mention of those blamed by locals.

According to NRCC Chairman Muzibur Rahman Howlader, no permanent structure can be built within 150-foot land on banks of rivers on which vessels move regularly. The restricted area is 10 feet for water bodies not used by vessels.

"We are aware that names of influential people, who grabbed the waterbody in Bandarban, were dropped from the list. We have asked the DC to send their names to us," he said.

About that, Bandarban Sadar Upazila Nirbahi Officer Md Noman Hossain said, "We will include the names upon investigation and send them to the commission again."

He further claimed that Kajal Kanti Das, an advisor to Bandarban AL, filled up portions of the canal to build a convention centre for his hotel.

Kajal rejected the allegation and claimed he bought the land.

Queried on the allegation of his involvement in land grabbing, Amal Das said, "We, including the hill tracts affairs minister, took the land on lease from the local administration a few years ago."

Mahbubur Rahman echoed his statement.

When reached over the phone a few months ago, Minister Ushwe Sing refused to make any comment. This correspondent contacted him several times later, including yesterday, but he did not pick up the calls.

This correspondent visited the office of Bandarban Deputy Commissioner Md Daudul Islam recently, but he did not agree to make any comment.

## Militants now active

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be organised by Center for Social Advocacy and Research Foundation (CSARF) in association with DMP's CITT unit.

A total of 12 round table meetings would be held during the programme and those would be participated by 36 extremism prevention experts, youths and other stakeholders.

Highlighting the necessity of such programmes, the CITT boss said programmes against terrorism that started taking place after Holey Artisan attack in 2016 lost its vigour over the years.

A united effort of law enforcers, civil society members, parents and teachers is a must to prevent the peril, he said.

"As terrorist activities are less frequent nowadays, many think that it has gone. But it actually has not. It [terrorism] is a real threat and persistent," the police official said.

Monirul, however, said the risk of militant attacks in the country was low.

Stressing on youths' engagement in the programme, the CITT boss said people aged between 15 and 30 were prone to take part in violent extremism.

CSARF Executive Director Shabnam Azim said Dhaka Peace Talk would build a network through which all stakeholders, especially youths, would work as community ambassadors and spread awareness.

Founded in 2019 by a group of researchers, university teachers and career journalists; CSARF is a nonprofit think-tank in the country, specialising in social advocacy, research and security threat analysis.

CSARF has a memorandum of understanding with CITT for preventing violent extremism activities.

## Village held hostage

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Later, the arbitration was called off.

In 2010, Jobor Ali, a relative of Anwar Hossain died of a heart attack, but family members of the deceased dumped the body in a nearby swamp to implicate their rivals.

Jobor's wife filed a murder case against some of their family rivals, but police found that Jobor died naturally. The case ended with the final police report.

In 2015, when the rivalry between Anwar Hossain and Abdul Mosobbir reached a new peak over grabbing government lands and waterbodies, several respected people in the upazila, including late parliamentarian Suranjit Sen Gupta, called for an arbitration between the two groups.

The arbitration was scheduled for October 9, and a woman of Moshobir's family was killed on October 8.

Nilufa Begum, wife of Abdul Mosobbir's nephew Gias Uddin, was hacked on a village road and she died at Sylhet MAG Osmani Medical College two days later.

Nilufa's father filed a case accusing Anwar Hossain, Salatul Miah,

Suleman Miah and 13 others and the case is still in progress.

There are allegations that Gias Uddin had quarrel with his wife and hacked her to death in an attempt to incriminate the rivals.

There was another attempt to settle the rivalry in progress which was supposed to take place this week, but Tuhin was brutally murdered right before the attempt of the arbitration.

Moreover, there were two knives, which were pierced deep inside his stomach, had the names of Suleman and Salatul written in the grip and the rivalry remains fresh.

While talking to Anwar Hossain, Suleman and Salatul on Friday afternoon, they all claimed that Abdul Mosobbir tried to frame them once again by writing down their names in the grip of the knives.

Anwar Hossain said, "After Nilufa's murder, many respected persons tried to stop the rivalry by arbitration but Abdul Mosobbir never wanted and all attempt went into vein. He murdered his nephew to implicate us, right before another arbitration was planned; like he did before in 2015".

## Young climate activists in Africa struggle to be heard

AFP, Accra

As Greta Thunberg and the Extinction Rebellion inspire climate protesters across the globe, young African activists say they still struggle to make themselves heard.

"No continent will be struck as severely by the impacts of climate change as Africa," the United Nations Environment Programme said as it warned of increased flooding, widespread food insecurity and major economic losses.

But awareness remains low and a study from research institute Afrobarometer in August said that four in 10 Africans have never heard of climate change.

At the Climate Chance conference in Ghana's capital Accra this week hundreds of campaigners, local government officials and business people from across the continent sought a way forward.

Togolese activist Kevin Ossah, 22, led a mock United Nations debate that pitched participants playing the role of major polluters like the United States against those set to bear the biggest burden of the crisis.

He said he admires the huge crowds taking to the streets from Sydney to Stockholm, but in his West African homeland -- ruled by an authoritarian regime that has cracked down on protests -- that wasn't really an option.

"As youth, we can't be putting our lives in insecurity by entering roads and doing something that Greta is doing," he told AFP.

Instead he plans to focus on more practical steps like planting trees, educating rural communities and writing to leaders calling for action.

"I think the thing we can do is use communication and digital communications skills," he said.

"We have to share information and let other people know about us and share the efforts that we are doing."

Africa produces only a tiny fraction of global greenhouse gas emissions and the fight against climate change can often be seen as an issue more for people living in the developed economies of Europe, America and Asia.

But those attending the conference insisted awareness could grow if local officials and activists focus on the problems Africans confront every day.

Akwannuash Gyimah, municipal chief executive of Asokwa in central Ghana, told AFP he was committed to increasing education about climate change to his constituents.

As a starting point he wants to target the poorly maintained vehicles that belch acrid black fumes into the faces of passersby in his region.

"It is difficult to deal with this situation because the people don't even understand what it means," he said in reference to the environmental impact.

Benin's former environment minister Luc Gnacadja said one problem was the lack of access to information and education on the issue.

He said young people needed localised data about the impact that climate change is having on populations and the economy to help lead the fight.

Crowds have taken to the streets in some African cities as part of the global protest movement -- but their numbers have been tiny compared to elsewhere.

Gnacadjia said the bold tactics employed by young demonstrators in the West did not readily translate to the rigid hierarchies of societies where challenging elders is often a taboo.

"They can't just go ahead and speak like Greta Thunberg, of course, the youth in Africa will have difficulty to say 'how dare you'," he said.

Those challenges did not seem to faze Patience Alifo, 23, from Ghana.

The climate campaigner insisted that youth needed to be included in the debate -- and that often it is the people in power who need educating the most.

Alifo said some authorities refuse to listen to young activists and the solutions they might propose.

Even at the climate conference, she insisted, more young people should be represented.

## Florida judge limits law targeting felon voting

AFP, Miami

A judge in the US state of Florida on Friday partially blocked a law requiring felons pay their fines before registering to vote, a decision with potential ramifications for next year's presidential election.

While the decision applies only to the 17 ex-convicts who filed the lawsuit, it also creates a path to registration for other ex-convicts who want to vote but are prevented from doing so by their debts.

"The State of Florida cannot deny restoration of a felon's right to vote solely because the felon does not have the financial resources necessary to pay restitution," federal judge Robert Hinkle wrote in his ruling.