

BIDEN’S CABINET PICKS




ANTONY BLINKEN: *Secretary of State*
Joe Biden nominated his longtime adviser Antony Blinken to be secretary of state. Blinken, 58, served as deputy secretary of state and deputy national security adviser during the Obama administration and has close ties with Biden. He is widely viewed as a pragmatic centrist on foreign policy who has supported past American interventions and is well respected by some Republicans.


ALEJANDRO MAYORKAS: *Homeland Security*
Biden announced the nomination of Alejandro Mayorkas, who served under Barack Obama as deputy secretary of Homeland Security and director of the Citizenship and Immigration Services. If confirmed by the Senate, Mayorkas, who turns 61 on Tuesday, would be the first Hispanic, and immigrant, to lead DHS. Born in Havana, Cuba, Mayorkas came to the United States as a political refugee with his family when he was a child.



AVRIL HAINES: *Director of National Intelligence*
Haines, 51, was the first woman to serve as Deputy Director of the CIA, a position she held from 2013 to 2015. If confirmed, she will be the first woman to oversee the 17 agencies that make up the nation's intelligence community. Biden's team are also vetting Representative Deb Haaland for the interior Secretary Post. She'd be the first Native American cabinet secretary.


JANET YELLEN: *Treasury Secretary*
Biden has chosen former Federal Reserve Chair Janet Yellen to serve as treasury secretary, a pivotal role in which she would help shape and direct his economic policies at a perilous time, according to a person familiar with the transition plans. Yellen, who is widely admired in the financial world, would be the first woman to lead the Treasury Department.





LINDA THOMAS-GREENFIELD: *Ambassador to the UN*
Joe Biden's pick to be the next US ambassador to the United Nations, if confirmed by the Senate, would be the most experienced diplomat of the six people named by Biden for top national security positions on Monday. Linda Thomas-Greenfield is a 35-year veteran of the State Department who served as ambassador to Liberia, director general of the foreign service and top diplomat for Africa before being forced out during the early months of the Trump administration. Biden plans to elevate the position of UN ambassador to Cabinet level.

JOHN KERRY: *Climate Envoy*
John Kerry, one of the leading architects of the Paris climate agreement, is getting one more chance to lead the fight against climate change after Biden named the former secretary of state as climate envoy for national security. It's a sign of how the incoming administration is heeding warnings that natural disasters from global warming will weaken US defense and spur conflicts around the globe. Unlike others, this role doesn't need Senate confirmation.



JAKE SULLIVAN: *National Security Adviser*
Biden will appoint Jake Sullivan to be his national security adviser. Sullivan, who at 43 will be one of the youngest national security advisers in history, was a top aide to former secretary of state Hillary Clinton before becoming then-vice president Biden's national security adviser.



Palestinian demonstrators gather as tear gas canisters are fired by Israeli forces during a protest against Jewish settlements in Jordan Valley in the Israeli-occupied West Bank yesterday. Riyadh denied Israeli media reports and a government source that Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu had held landmark talks in Saudi Arabia with Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman. The reports fuelled speculation that the Jewish state may be getting closer to normalising ties with the biggest Gulf power after its historic US-brokered deals since September with the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain.

PHOTO: REUTERS

CORONAVIRUS VACCINE RACE

Poorest must not be trampled: WHO

AFP, Geneva

With Covid-19 vaccines on the horizon, the planet's poorest must not be trampled as countries scramble to get their hands on them, the World Health Organization said Monday.

WHO director-general Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said the latest batch of promising results from final-phase candidate vaccine trials showed there was light at the end of the "long dark tunnel" of the coronavirus pandemic.

But he said the world had to ensure they were distributed fairly across the globe.

"Every government rightly wants to do everything it can to protect its people," Tedros told a virtual press conference.

"But there is now a real risk that the poorest and most vulnerable will be trampled in the stampede for vaccines."

AstraZeneca and Oxford University said their prospective vaccine had proved on average 70 percent effective at stopping the virus after trying it on 23,000 people, days after tests of two other candidate vaccines suggested they had more than 90 percent effectiveness.



"With the latest positive news from vaccine trials, the light at the end of this long dark tunnel is growing brighter. There is now real hope that vaccines in combination with other tried and tested public health measures, will help to end the pandemic," said Tedros.

"The significance of this scientific achievement cannot be overstated. No vaccines in history have been developed as rapidly as these. The scientific community has set a new

standard for vaccine development."

Anticipating the huge demand for any approved vaccine, the WHO has helped create the so-called Covax facility to ensure equitable distribution. Tedros said 187 countries were now on board.

The international vaccine procurement pool aims to lay its hands on two billion doses of safe and effective vaccines by the end of next year.

However, it is struggling to raise the funds needed to provide for the 92 low-income countries and other economies that quickly signed up.

Tedros said \$4.3 billion was needed immediately to support the mass procurement and delivery of Covid-19 vaccines, tests and treatments, while a further \$23.8 billion would be needed in 2021.

"The real question is not whether the world can afford to share Covid-19 vaccines and other tools; it's whether it can afford not to," said Tedros.

Leaders at the virtual G20 summit said Sunday they would "spare no effort" to ensure fair distribution of coronavirus vaccines, but the united front was punctured by Angela Merkel who voiced concern about slow progress.



French gendarmes evacuate a makeshift tent camp set up by migrants, officials and ONG volunteers on Republique square in Paris on Monday night, one week after migrants were evacuated from another camp in the working-class suburb of Saint-Denis, north of Paris.

PHOTO: AFP

‘We all need a bit more room to move’

Aussie PM lams pressure of US-Sino rivalry

AFP, Sydney

Australia has hit out at "needlessly" worsening relations with China, with the country's prime minister appealing for smaller nations not to be caught in the crossfire of Sino-US rivalry.

Prime Minister Scott Morrison decried mounting Chinese pressure and rejected the portrayal of Australia as a US lapdog, saying it was wrong and "needlessly deteriorates relationships" in an online speech to a London forum late Monday.

Morrison insisted Australia wanted "mutually beneficial" relations with both its largest trading partner and the United States, while having the right to pursue its own interests independent of both.

In recent months, Canberra's relationship with Beijing has gone from bad to worse.

In a nod to the incoming administration of US president-elect Joe Biden, Morrison also insisted countries like Australia should not be asked to pick sides as Washington and Beijing duke it out for influence.

"Greater latitude will be required from the world's largest powers to accommodate the individual interests of their partners and allies. We all need a bit more room to move," Morrison told the UK Policy Exchange.

During the last four years, US President Donald Trump has taken a confrontational approach, trying to rally allies to counter China's rising influence, something critics say risks creating a Cold War-style standoff between two competing power blocs.

Ethiopia war in ‘decisive phase’

Fear for civilians grows as Tigray leader tells PM his people ‘ready to die’

AFP, Gondar

International pressure mounted yesterday on the warring parties in northern Ethiopia to cease fighting and protect civilians in Tigray, whose leaders Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed has given a deadline to surrender.

The UN Security Council was to convene its first meeting on Tigray later yesterday, where forces loyal to the region's ruling party have been battling Ethiopian soldiers for nearly three weeks, sparking a refugee exodus, civilian deaths and fears of broader instability in the Horn of Africa.

Abiy, last year's Nobel Peace Prize winner, ordered troops, tanks and warplanes into Tigray on November 4 in response to an alleged attack on federal military camps by the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF).

The army says it has encircled Mekele, the regional capital, ahead of a threatened all-out assault.

The prime minister, who has



resisted calls for mediation and insists the conflict has reached a decisive final stage, on Sunday gave the TPLF 72 hours to surrender -- an ultimatum rejected by the dissident region's leader, who says his people are "ready to die" for the homeland.

The prospect of a devastating bombardment of Mekele, a city of half a million people and a refuge for many more fleeing the conflict, has alarmed rights groups who warn such an attack on a civilian centre could contravene international law.

The fighting has already driven more than 40,000 people into Sudan

and reportedly killed hundreds and forced many more to flee within Tigray, though the true extent of death and displacement is not yet known.

A communications blackout and restrictions on reporting in the region have made claims from both sides difficult to verify.

The TPLF on Monday said it routed an army battalion and claimed responsibility for a rocket attack on Bahir Dar, the capital of Amhara region to the south of Tigray, whose local forces are fighting alongside Ethiopian troops. The government said that "a large number of Tigray militia and special forces are surrendering" following the issuance of Abiy's 72-hour ultimatum.

Long-running tensions between Addis Ababa and the TPLF, which dominated Ethiopia for nearly three decades before Abiy came to power in 2018, boiled over in September when Tigray proceeded with regional elections in defiance of the federal government, which declared the vote illegal.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Darwin notebooks ‘stolen’ from Cambridge University

Two of Charles Darwin's notebooks containing his pioneering ideas on evolution and his famous "Tree of Life" sketch are missing, believed stolen, the Cambridge University Library said yesterday. The British scientist filled the leather notebooks in 1837 after returning from his voyage on the HMS Beagle. The library said they were worth millions of pounds. In one book, he drew a diagram showing several possibilities for the evolution of a species and later published a more developed illustration in his 1859 book "On the Origin of Species". The University of Cambridge's vast library first listed the notebooks as missing in 2001. They were long believed to have been incorrectly filed within the building, which contains around 10 million books, maps and manuscripts and has one of the world's most significant Darwin archives. However a major search this year -- the largest in the library's history -- failed to turn up the notebooks.

Pope, for first time, says Uighurs are ‘persecuted’

In a new book, Pope Francis for the first time calls China's Muslim Uighurs a "persecuted" people, something human rights activists have been urging him to do for years. "I think often of persecuted peoples: the Rohingya, the poor Uighurs, the Yazidi," he said in a section where he also talks about persecuted Christians in Islamic countries. In the wide-ranging "Let Us Dream: The Path to A Better Future," Francis also says the Covid-19 pandemic should spur governments to consider permanently establishing a universal basic income. In the book, a 150-page collaboration with his English-language biographer, Austen Ivereigh, Francis speaks of economic, social and political changes he says are needed to address inequalities after the pandemic ends. It goes on sale on Dec. 1.

Pakistan behind Kashmir attack, India tells UNSC

India on Monday told the main UN Security Council powers that it feels pressure to hit back at Pakistan after accusing its neighbour of arming four militants shot dead in a gun battle last week, diplomats who attended a special meeting said. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has said the four were plotting "to wreak major havoc" with an attack aiming to disrupt local elections in the disputed territory of Kashmir starting this week. A top Indian foreign ministry official handed over a dossier to envoys from the Security Council permanent members -- the United States, France, Britain, Russia and China -- which it said showed Pakistan involvement in the militant operation. India said the four were planning the "biggest" attack since a suicide bomber killed 40 Indian paramilitaries in Kashmir in February 2019.

SOURCE: AFP, REUTERS