



Hunger surges to record levels in Yemen: UN

AFP, Sanaa

Malnutrition in conflict-hit Yemen has reached record levels, narrowing the window of opportunity to prevent a famine, the UN has said, as the coronavirus and funding shortfalls threaten a humanitarian perfect storm.

The number of people facing the second highest level of food insecurity in Yemen is set to increase from 3.6 million people to 5 million in the first half of 2021, the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) warned on Thursday.

Yemen, which since 2014 has been gripped by a war between Iran-backed Huthi rebels and a beleaguered government supported by a Saudi-led military coalition, faces the world's worst humanitarian crisis.

"Yemen is on the brink of famine and we must not turn our backs on the millions of families who are now in desperate need," said WFP executive director David Beasley.

The UN warned in July that nearly one in nine people in the world are going hungry, with the novel coronavirus pandemic and climate-related shocks exacerbating already worsening trends this year.

In Yemen's children's wards, the evidence of the crisis is clear, with skeletal children crying weakly as anxious families hover over them.

Before the war erupted, Yemen was already the poorest country in the Arabian Peninsula, and with its economy now in tatters, some 80 percent of the population depends on aid to survive.

China 'greatest threat' to global democracy, freedom

Says US intel chief; Beijing slams allegations as 'hodgepodge of lies'

AFP, Washington

Beijing yesterday lashed out at a claim by the US intelligence chief that China is the "greatest threat to democracy and freedom worldwide", calling it a "hodgepodge of lies".

The war of words comes as relations between the two superpowers have spiralled to their lowest point in decades and as Washington unveiled travel restrictions for members of the Chinese Communist Party.

US Director of National Intelligence John Ratcliffe said in a Wall Street Journal opinion piece on Thursday that Chinese spies were using economic pressure to influence or undermine US legislators.

"The People's Republic of China poses the greatest threat to America today, and the greatest threat to democracy and freedom worldwide since World War II," he wrote.

Beijing hit back angrily yesterday. "[Ratcliffe] only continues to repeat lies and rumours to slander and discredit China, and wantonly play up the Chinese threat," said Chinese foreign ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying.

"I think this is yet another hodgepodge of lies that the US government has been cooking up lately."

Hua also accused the US of being "engaged in a Cold War mindset, advocating major power competition, and wantonly expanding its nuclear weapons arsenal".

The world's two biggest economies have traded blows over the coronavirus pandemic, trade and technology competition, espionage, human rights and media freedoms under US President Donald Trump's tenure.

The US has repeatedly stressed that China is a grave threat to national security and Western democratic values, while China has accused the US of seeking to contain its rise through unlawful means.

Under the new US travel rules, visas issued to party members and their immediate family will remain valid for just one month, and for a single entry.

Previously some visas were issued that permitted unlimited entries and could remain valid for as long as 10 years.

The party, which dominates politics in Beijing and around the country, had 92 million members in 2019, so the State Department decision covering their families could affect several hundred million Chinese.

The United States shut down the Chinese consulate in Houston in July, calling it a centre of espionage and harassment of Chinese nationals in the US.

In retaliation Beijing ordered the US to vacate its consulate in Chengdu.

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Farmers protest against the newly passed farm bills at Singhu border near Delhi, India, yesterday. The protesting farmers have called a nationwide shutdown on Tuesday, saying they will block all roads to the capital after their fourth-round talks with government to withdraw the bills failed Thursday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

NEWS IN BRIEF



White House communications director Alyssa Farah resigns

White House communication director Alyssa Farah announced her resignation Thursday, in what appeared to be a tacit acknowledgement of Donald Trump's loss in last month's US presidential election. Farah has mostly laid low since the November 3 election, in which President-elect Joe Biden defeated Trump. But Trump has refused to concede, touting conspiracy theories and unfounded claims of fraud to explain his loss. Farah's attitude stands in contrast with that of White House spokeswoman Kayleigh McEnany, who has amplified her boss's baseless claims of fraud and a rigged election.

EU mulls Turkey sanctions

European Council chief Charles Michel yesterday said that Turkey has not de-escalated its stand-off with Greece in response to diplomatic outreach and warned EU member states would now consider sanctions.

"I think that the cat and mouse game needs to end," Michel said, referring to Turkey's repeated incursions into Greek waters with gas exploration vessels. "We will have a debate at the European summit on December 10 and we are ready to use the means at our disposal," he said. Next week's EU summit will be held in Brussels, with the leaders meeting face-to-face.

UK vows 68pc emissions cut by end of decade

Britain will aim to cut its greenhouse gas emissions by more than two-thirds this decade, in what the government said would be the fastest reduction of any major economy. The target to reduce emissions by 68 percent by 2030, compared to 1990 levels, is part of legally-binding plans for the country to become carbon neutral by 2050. It comes as Britain prepares to co-host a December 12 Climate Ambition Summit and stages COP26, the United Nations' annual climate gathering, in Glasgow next November. Prime Minister Boris Johnson last month unveiled plans for "a green industrial revolution". It includes banning petrol and diesel new vehicle sales, quadrupling offshore wind power and scaling up hydrogen production capacity, all within the decade.

SOURCE: AFP, REUTERS

Brexit talks near climax

France threatens veto as EU chief urges bloc to stay united

AFP, Brussels

European doubts over a post-Brexit trade deal with Britain boiled over yesterday, with France threatening a veto even as intense negotiations entered what could be their final hours.

EU and UK negotiators Michel Barnier and David Frost were locked in last-minute debates over fishing rights, fair trade rules and an enforcement mechanism to govern any deal.

But with time running out if the eventual accord is to be ratified before the end of the year and Britain's departure from the EU single market, EU capitals are getting cold feet.

"If there's a deal that isn't a good one, we'd oppose it," France's minister for European affairs Clement Beaune told Europe 1 radio, adding that "every country has the right to veto".

A European diplomat told AFP that Belgium, the Netherlands, Spain and Denmark share France's concerns that in the rush to conclude a deal, Barnier will give too much ground to London on rules to maintain fair competition.

"We don't want to lock in an unbalanced relationship for decades to come," he said.

Thus far, the capitals have remained united behind their champion Barnier, who has been battling Frost long into the night as UK premier Boris Johnson faces his own choice about whether to compromise.

"We are committed to reaching an agreement with the EU," UK Business Secretary Alok Sharma told the BBC. "But, of course, time is short and we are in a difficult phase. There's no denying that."

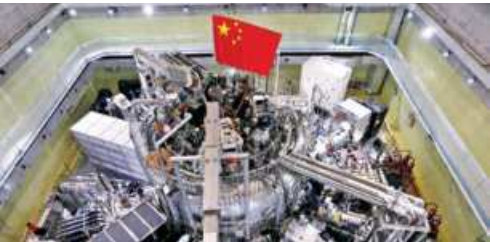
British officials have complained that, with the negotiations coming to a conclusion, the EU has made new demands that London agree to set up an independent body to regulate state subsidies.

In Brussels, diplomatic sources told AFP that some capitals are concerned that Germany and the European Commission are too keen to agree a deal quickly. However, Germany later yesterday issued a statement saying that EU wanted a deal but "at any cost".

EU chief Charles Michel urged members to remain united behind Brussels' negotiators.

The UK left the European Union on January 31 and its post-Brexit transition period stretches until the end of this month, when it leaves the EU single market.

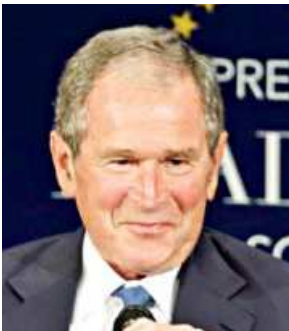
China turns on 'artificial sun'



China successfully powered up its "artificial sun" nuclear fusion reactor for the first time, state media reported yesterday, marking a great advance in the country's nuclear power research capabilities. The HL-2M Tokamak reactor is China's largest and most advanced nuclear fusion experimental research device, and scientists hope that the device can potentially unlock a powerful clean energy source. It uses a powerful magnetic field to fuse hot plasma and can reach temperatures of over 150 million degrees Celsius, according to the People's Daily - approximately ten times hotter than the core of the sun. Located in southwestern Sichuan province and completed late last year, the reactor is often called an "artificial sun" on account of the enormous heat and power it produces. Unlike fission, fusion emits no greenhouse gases and carries less risk of accidents or the theft of atomic material.

Probe leaves Moon for Earth

A Chinese space probe has lifted off from the surface of the Moon to return to Earth, an ambitious effort to bring back the first lunar samples in four decades. The Chang'e-5 spacecraft, named after the mythical Chinese Moon goddess, left the Moon at 1510 GMT Thursday, said China's space agency. A module carrying lunar rocks and soil was launched into orbit by a powerful thrust engine, officials said of the mission that landed Tuesday on the Moon. Video footage from China's state broadcaster CCTV showed the probe taking off from the surface of the Moon in a bright burst of light. The module then must undergo the delicate operation of linking up with the part of the spacecraft that is to bring the specimens back to Earth, official news agency Xinhua reported. Scientists hope the samples will help them learn about the Moon's origins, formation and volcanic activity on its surface.



WHO looks at e-certificates for vaccination

AFP, Copenhagen

The World Health Organization said it was considering introducing electronic vaccination certificates, as hopes for an end to the pandemic were boosted after Britain became the first country to approve use of a Covid-19 vaccine.

"We are looking very closely into the use of technology in this Covid-19 response and one of them is how can we work with members states towards something called an e-vaccination certificate," WHO Europe expert Siddhartha Datta told an online press briefing Thursday.

Introducing such a certificate, which would make it possible to identify and monitor people who have been vaccinated, has not been finalised and would have to be drawn up in accordance with national laws, Datta said.

It would not be an immunity passport, which is supposed to assure that its carrier is protected against the disease because they have been infected and recovered.

Ex-presidents of US to publicly receive Covid vaccine

AFP, Washington

Former US presidents Barack Obama, George W Bush and Bill Clinton as well as President-elect Joe Biden are volunteering to take a coronavirus vaccine on camera if it will help promote public confidence.

Obama, in an interview with SiriusXM radio, said he would be inoculated if top US infectious disease expert Anthony Fauci signs off on a Covid-19 vaccine.

"If Anthony Fauci tells me this vaccine is safe, and can vaccinate, you know, immunize you from getting Covid, absolutely, I'm going to take it," Obama said.

"I promise you that when it's been made for people who are less at risk, I will be taking it," he said.

"I may end up taking it on TV or having it filmed, just so that people know that I trust this science, and what I don't trust is getting Covid," Obama said.

Freddy Ford, Bush's chief of staff, told CNN the former president also wanted to help promote vaccination.

Angel Urena, Clinton's press secretary, told CNN the former president would also be up for getting a vaccine in public on television.

Later in the day, Biden told CNN that he, too, would be willing to be vaccinated in public after government approval of vaccines, specifically saying he would rely on Fauci to say it was safe. Biden said he had asked the Fauci to remain in his post and join his Covid-19 team after he takes office.

He also lauded the three former presidents for their commitment, saying they had "set the model as to what should be done."

A top science official said Wednesday the United States hopes to have immunized 100 million people by the end of February.



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Bangladesh Regional Connectivity Project-1
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Eskaton Garden, Dhaka-1000

Memo No. 26.00.0000.066.07.029.20-461 Date: 03/12/2020

Request for Expressions of Interest (Consulting Firm)

Name of the Service: **Selection of Consulting Firm (National) for "Designing and Implementing Training Program for Increasing Women's Participation in the ICT Sector in Bangladesh"**

Name of the Project: Bangladesh Regional Connectivity Project 1, Ministry of Commerce
Credit No. 60020; Project ID No. 154580
Reference Number: BRCP/MOC/SD-20

Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh has received an SDR 150 million Credit from the International Development Association (IDA) – a member of the World Bank group – for financing the cost of the Bangladesh Regional Connectivity Project 1 (BRCP-1), being jointly implemented by the Bangladesh Land Port Authority (BLPA), National Board of Revenue (NBR) and Ministry of Commerce. The second component of this umbrella project is being implemented by the Ministry of Commerce as a separate technical assistance project. The overall objective of this technical assistance project is to strengthen trade related institutional capacity in order to ensure active and sustainable cooperation between multiple trade-related stakeholders and economic empowerment of women traders.

This technical assistance project intends to apply part of the IDA Credit for procuring consultancy services from qualified consulting firm (national) to develop and deliver/implement a training curriculum that allows women to better use ICT for export facilitation in Bangladesh, enhances women's engagement in the ICT sector and export of ICT-related products or services. In designing the training curriculum the consultant should focus on the top ten leading exports and other important products/services including but not limited to agro-processing, and ICT in Bangladesh.

The Project Implementation Unit BRCP-1-MOC on behalf of the Ministry of Commerce invites eligible consultants to indicate their interest in providing the services. Interested consultants must provide information indicating that they are qualified to perform the services (brochures, general qualifications, description of similar assignments, general experience in similar conditions, financial capability, number of key staff and **so forth as per TOR**). Consultants may associate to enhance their qualifications. Details of the qualification requirements and responsibilities are available in TOR.

The attention of interested consultants is drawn to paragraphs 3.14 to 3.18 of the World Bank Group's Procurement Regulations for IPF Borrowers, Procurement in Investment Project Financing, Goods, Works, Non-Consulting and Consulting Services, July 2016 ("Procurement Regulations"), setting forth the World Bank Group's policy on conflict of interest. A Consultant will be selected in accordance with the Quality Cost-Based Selection (QCBS) (Lump-sum Contract) method set out in the Procurement Regulations.

Terms of Reference (TOR) will be available in the office of the undersigned and also at www.mincom.gov.bd and <http://brcp-1.gov.bd/>. Further information can be obtained at the address below during office hours (i.e. 09.00 to 17.00 hours). Expressions of Interest must be delivered in a written form 2 (two) copies (one original and one copy) and one soft copy (in MS Word) in sealed envelope to the address below (in person, or by mail) **by 12.30pm on December 24, 2020**.

The authority reserves the right to accept or reject any or all EOIs without assigning any reason, whatsoever.

Md. Mijanur Rahman
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GD-1934