

WHO PANDEMIC ACCORD

Countries agree to negotiate

World Health Organization member states yesterday agreed to start work on building a new international accord setting out how to handle the next global pandemic.

Countries adopted a resolution at a special meeting in Geneva, launching the process that it is hoped should result in a new agreement on pandemics.

The three-day meeting of the World Health Assembly -- the WHO's decision-making body comprising all 194 member states -- was an unprecedented special session on how to handle the next pandemic.

Countries agreed to establish an intergovernmental negotiating body "to draft and negotiate a WHO convention, agreement or other international instrument on pandemic prevention, preparedness and response."

The body's first meeting must be no later than March 1 next year to elect two co-chairs and four vice-chairs.

A progress report will be presented at the regular World Health Assembly annual gathering in 2023, with the final outcome

presented for consideration at the 2024 WHA.

"We need a game change in our global health architecture, so that the international community can respond to future pandemics collectively, effectively and immediately," said Lotte Knudsen, the EU's ambassador in Geneva, said in a statement.

"Today's decision of the World Health Assembly will therefore make history. The situation and our citizens demand it: we need to strengthen pandemic prevention, preparedness and response if we do not want to find ourselves in a similar situation in the future."

At the start of the three-day gathering on Monday, WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus told world leaders: "The emergence of the highly-mutated Omicron variant underlines just how perilous and precarious our situation is. Omicron demonstrates just why the world needs a new accord on pandemics."

"We shouldn't need another wake-up call... although many of us might think we're done with Covid-19, it's not done with us."

Intergovernmental body's first meeting must be no later than March 1 next year

A progress report will be presented at the regular annual gathering in 2023



A health worker collects swab samples from a traveller to test for the Covid-19 coronavirus at a railway station in New Delhi, India yesterday. India suspended resumption of regular international flights from December 15, in view of the emergence of Omicron variant.

PHOTO: AFP

Quote of the day



I have one simple request for all member states, and that is: end this pandemic. Just in the past week, this virus [Covid-19] has demonstrated that it will not simply disappear."

WHO CHIEF TEDROS ADHANOM GHEBREYESUS SAID IN CLOSING THE THREE-DAY GATHERING AT GENEVA

AVERTING MASS POVERTY IN AFGHANISTAN

UN pushes cash handouts

Taliban urge US to release frozen funds in Doha talks

AGENCIES

The United Nations said yesterday that a program to pay \$300 million a year in cash to Afghan families with children, elderly or people with disabilities is the best way to target increasing poverty.

In what the UN Development Programme (UNDP) described as an "alarming" socio-economic outlook for Afghanistan for the next 13 months, it also pushed a \$100 million "cash for work" project to boost employment and \$90 million in small business payments.

"This will be probably the best shot at halting this massive collapse into near universal poverty," UNDP Regional Director for Asia and the Pacific, Kanni Wignaraja, told Reuters.

As Afghanistan struggles with a sharp drop in international development aid after the Taliban seized power in mid-August, an economy and banking system on

the brink of collapse, the Covid-19 pandemic and severe drought, UNDP has projected that poverty may become nearly universal by mid 2022 - affecting more than 90 percent of the country's 39 million people.

The UN World Food Programme has said 22.8 million people are facing acute food insecurity.

UNDP set up a special trust fund in October, with a 50 million euros (\$58 million) pledge from Germany, to provide urgently needed cash directly to Afghans. So far, the fund has received pledges for \$170 million.

The UNDP report makes the case for boosting a cash payment program, known as ABADEL, which was launched in October. Since then UNDP said it has made \$100,000 in "cash for work" payments, creating jobs for 2,300 people in Mazar, Kunduz and Herat, and is being expanded to other provinces.

The report also warned that Afghanistan's economic growth will

not turn positive in the near term unless restrictions on women working are lifted, \$250 million a year in aid to combat COVID-19 continues and sanctions are eased to allow for humanitarian assistance.

Meanwhile, Taliban renewed its call for the United States to release billions of dollars in frozen funds after two days of talks in Doha. The Afghans also called for an end to blacklists and sanctions in meetings led by Taliban Foreign Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi and Tom West, the US special representative for Afghanistan, reports AFP.

It was the second round of talks between the two sides in Qatar since the US ended its 20-year occupation of Afghanistan.

"The two delegations discussed political, economic, human, health, education and security issues," tweeted Afghan foreign ministry spokesman Abdul Qahar Balkhi.

'Mobility divide' looms

IOM says migration between richer countries risen as conflict, climate change increased internal displacement in fragile states

REUTERS, Geneva

Migration between richer countries has risen, while conflict and climate change have increased internal displacement in fragile states that many people cannot leave, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) said yesterday.

Eighteen of the top 20 countries of origin for migrants in 2020 were highly developed, up from seven in 1995, said Marie McAuliffe, head of the UN migration agency's research division and editor of its 2022 World Migration Report.

At the same time, the number of people internally displaced grew in 2020 to 55 million globally, up from 51 million in 2019 - a vulnerability exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic, which has grounded many would-be migrants.

"We are at risk of an international mobility divide with potential consequences for global inequality," McAuliffe told reporters.

For the relatively rich, Europe's passport-free Schengen area has provided migration opportunities for some 400 million European citizens, allowing, for example, Portuguese citizens to live and work in Germany.

By contrast, the IOM said "international migration pathways for millions of people in developing countries have further narrowed", denying many the opportunities for betterment that migration

has traditionally offered. Afghans, for example, lack the "power passports" of more stable countries. Many of them cannot access passports and even those who can confront barriers to international travel, McAuliffe said.

Of the 55 million internally displaced persons in 2020, 48 million fled conflict and violence and seven million were



uprooted by disasters such as hurricanes and wildfires - often caused by climate change.

In the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Cameroon, for example, heavy rain and flooding led to around 279,000 and 116,000 new displacements, respectively.

"While COVID-19 kept many millions of people grounded around the world, the total size of the global displaced population actually grew and new internal displacements also increased," McAuliffe said.



Villagers pay their tribute to one of the two elephants that died after colliding sideways with a train in Morigaon, Assam, India yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

COUP-HIT MYANMAR

Suu Kyi faces new graft charge

REUTERS

Myanmar's military government has filed a new corruption charge against deposed civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi and former President Win Myint, state-run broadcaster MRTV reported on Tuesday.

The new charge relates to the purchase and rental of a helicopter and falls under the anti-corruption law, violations of which are punishable by up to 15 years in prison.

Suu Kyi, 76, was ousted in a February 1 coup and faces nearly a dozen cases against her including incitement and violations of Covid-19 protocols. She has rejected all the charges to date.

BID TO CHALLENGE CHINA'S INFLUENCE

EU plans 300b euros in development aid

AFP, Brussels

The European Commission yesterday announced a plan to mobilise 300 billion euros (\$340 billion) in public and private infrastructure investment around the world, a move seen as a response to China's Belt and Road strategy.

"Global Gateway will aim at mobilising investments of up to 300 billion euros between 2021 and 2027... bringing together resources of the EU, member states, European financial institutions and national development finance institutions," a commission document said.

The Global Gateway plan does not mention China's rival and longer-standing international infrastructure strategy by name -- but EU chief Ursula von der Leyen called it a "roadmap for major investment in infrastructure development around the world."

The money to be made available will not come from EU and member state coffers, and the plan will need funding from international institutions and from the private sector if it is to get anywhere near its target.

China launched its global investment strategy known as Belt and Road, a flagship project of President Xi Jinping, in 2013. Beijing has said it had invested \$139.8 billion by 2020, including \$22.5 billion last year alone.

Pak PM, cabinet members responsible

IHC CJ on recovery of missing persons

DAWN ONLINE

The Islamabad High Court (IHC) Chief Justice Athar Minallah remarked yesterday that the responsibility of missing persons falls on the prime minister and members of the federal cabinet.

Justice Minallah made the remarks while hearing a petition filed by Rana Mehmood Ikram, father of journalist Mudassar Mehmood, who had reportedly gone missing on August 19, 2018.

Human Rights Minister Shireen Mazari and Interior Secretary Yousuf Naseem Khokhar appeared for yesterday's hearing. Additional attorney general Qasim Wadud and deputy attorney general Syed Tayyab Shah were also present in the courtroom. Advocate Usman Warraich appeared on

behalf of the missing journalist's father. However, Advocate Imaan Mazari was not present as she was unwell.

During yesterday's hearing, Justice Minallah told the minister that she had been summoned because the state was not "visible" in tackling the issue of enforced disappearances.

"A person going missing is a crime against humanity. The prime minister and members of the cabinet are there to serve the people of the country. The state's response towards recovering missing persons is pathetic," he remarked.

Justice Minallah said that if a person comes to court stating that a loved one has disappeared, it means that the state has failed. He remarked that the state being accused of kidnapping a citizen was a "serious crime".



Table with 5 columns: Sr. No., Name, Amount, Date, and Remarks. It lists various government employees and their salaries, along with other financial details.