

## World now at 'critical juncture' in pandemic

Says WHO chief, urges countries to work together

AGENCIES

The head of the World Health Organization yesterday urged countries to work together to bring the acute phase of the pandemic to an end, saying that they now have all the tools available to do so.

"The Covid-19 pandemic is now entering its third year and we are at a critical juncture," said Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus at a press conference alongside Germany's development minister Svenja Schulze.

"We must work together to bring the acute phase of this pandemic to an end. We cannot let it continue to drag on, lurching between panic and neglect."

Tedros also said that Germany had become the agency's largest donor, without giving details. Historically, the United States has made the biggest financial contribution among member states to the organisation.

Schulze said that the top priority of Germany, which took over the G7 Presidency, is to end the pandemic worldwide and called for a "massively accelerated, truly global vaccination campaign" in order to do so.

The coronavirus has killed at least 5,593,747 people since the outbreak emerged in China, according to an AFP tally compiled yesterday.



(L-R) Mahbouba Seraj of the Afghan Women's Network, Ismail Ghazanfar and Heda Khamoush attend a meeting with international special representatives and representatives of Afghans with a background from civil society in Oslo, Norway yesterday. A Taliban delegation is visiting Oslo for meetings with Norwegian officials and Afghan civil society representatives focused on the humanitarian situation in Afghanistan and human rights.

PHOTO: AFP

## RUSSIA'S MILITARY BUILDUP NEAR UKRAINE

# US weighs troop options

Tells diplomats' families to leave Kyiv; UK withdrawing embassy staff

REUTERS, Washington

The US State Department announced Sunday it was ordering diplomats' family members to leave Ukraine, as US President Joe Biden weighed options for boosting America's military assets in Eastern Europe to counter a buildup of Russian troops.

The order, which also allowed US diplomats stationed at the embassy in the Ukrainian capital Kyiv to leave voluntarily, was one of the clearest signs yet that American officials are bracing for an aggressive Russian move in the region.

"Military action by Russia could come at any time," the US Embassy said in

a statement. Officials "will not be in a position to evacuate American citizens in such a contingency, so US citizens currently present in Ukraine should plan accordingly," it added.

The British Embassy in Ukraine said yesterday some staff and dependants were being withdrawn from Kyiv in response to "a growing threat from Russia".

Meanwhile, Nato said yesterday it was putting forces on standby and reinforcing eastern Europe with more ships and fighter jets in response to the Russia's military build-up.

Tensions in Ukraine have been increasing for months after the Kremlin massed some 100,000 troops near Ukraine's

borders, a dramatic buildup the West says is preparation for a war to prevent Ukraine from ever joining the Nato Western security alliance.

The Kremlin has repeatedly denied planning to invade, but the Russian military already tore off a chunk of Ukrainian territory when it seized Crimea and backed separatist forces who took control of large parts of eastern Ukraine eight years ago.

The US State Department's announcement comes a day after British authorities said they had information the Russian government was considering a former Ukrainian lawmaker as a potential candidate to head a pro-Russian leadership in Kyiv.

## Soldiers detain Burkina president

AFP, Ouagadougou

The president of Burkina Faso was arrested yesterday and detained by soldiers along with members of his cabinet, security sources said, one day after troops staged a mutiny in the jihadist-wracked country. Soldiers rose up at several army bases across the West African state on Sunday, demanding the sacking of the military top brass and more resources to fight the Islamist insurgency that erupted in 2015. President Roch Marc Christian Kabore, in power since 2015 and who won re-election in 2020 vowing to prioritise the fight against the insurgency, has faced rising public anger about failure to stop the bloodshed. "President Kabore, the head of parliament and the ministers are effectively in the hands of the soldiers" at the Sangoule Lamizana barracks in the capital Ouagadougou, a security source said. The situation was tense and confused in the capital, where mobile internet had been cut on Sunday, making it difficult to verify rumours of a coup in progress.

## Assange can take extradition case to UK's top court

REUTERS, London

WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange was yesterday given the chance to challenge a decision allowing him to be extradited to the United States to face 18 criminal charges including breaking a spying law to Britain's Supreme Court. US authorities are seeking Australian-born Assange, 50, to face trial on 18 counts relating to WikiLeaks' release of vast troves of confidential US military records and diplomatic cables which they said had put lives in danger. In December, the High Court in London overturned a lower court's ruling that he should not be extradited on health ground. While judges refused him permission for a direct appeal to the Supreme Court on their decision, they said his case raised an issue of legal importance that he could ask the UK's top court to rule on.





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