

International

207 killed in Western Ethiopia attack by gunmen: Rights body

Ethiopia's election commission sets polls for June 5

ADDIS ABABA: A total of 207 people were killed in a Wednesday attack by gunmen in western Ethiopia, the country's Human Rights Commission (EHRC) said, more than doubling a previous count. The independent government body had on Wednesday said 100 people were killed in their sleep and crops burned in a pre-dawn assault in the Metekel area of the Benishangul-Gumuz region.

"133 of the victims were adult men and 35 were adult women. Seventeen children, one of whom a six-month-old baby, and 20 elderly persons were killed," the EHRC said in a statement posted to Twitter late Friday. Mostly inhabited by ethnic Shinasha, Oromo and Amhara people—the last two making up Ethiopia's most numerous groups—the Metekel area has suffered a string of deadly attacks in recent months.

Local leaders blame ethnic Gumuz people for the violence. Following Wednesday's attack, "effort is underway to identify the victims with the help of survivors and identity cards," the EHRC said.

The body repeated its appeal for "relevant authorities to provide urgently humanitarian assistance to the victims and persons displaced by the attack."

It added that around 10,000 had fled the Bekuji Kebele area and made for the city of Bulen, around 40 kilometers (25 miles) away, which is already sheltering "thousands of displaced persons". "Bulen city is overwhelmed. The roads leading to the city are still teeming with displaced persons and their herds of cattle," one eyewitness told the commission. Regional authorities said on Thursday that

troops had killed 42 armed men alleged to have taken part in the massacre, without giving details about their identities.

"The massacre in the Benishangul-Gumuz region is very tragic," Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed said in a Twitter post on Thursday, conceding the government's efforts to solve the problem "had not yielded results". In October, he had said that fighters "armed and trained" in Sudan's neighbouring Blue Nile state were behind the violence and urged Khartoum to tackle the problem.

Abiy claimed that the latest attack had been aimed at "dividing the significant force" deployed to the country's dissident northern Tigray region. There is no known link between the violence in Benishangul-Gumuz and military operations in Tigray.

Thousands have been killed in the Tigray conflict, according to the International Crisis Group think tank, and more than 50,000 people have fled over the border into Sudan.

Elections

Ethiopia will hold legislative and regional elections on June 5 next year, the electoral commission said Friday after polls scheduled for 2020 were delayed by the coronavirus pandemic. The cancelled elections were a factor that stoked tensions between Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed and the dissident northern Tigray region, which ultimately saw him dispatch federal troops there in a November military offensive that left thousands dead and created tens of thousands of refugees. The elections in



In this file photo a man stands in front of his destroyed house in the village of Bisober in Ethiopia's Tigray region. A total of 207 people were killed in a Wednesday attack by gunmen in western Ethiopia, the country's Human Rights Commission (EHRC) said, more than doubling a previous count. — AFP

Ethiopia, Africa's second most populous country with some 110 million people, are largely seen as an important political transition process announced by Abiy, last year's Nobel Peace prize winner.

Abiy, who came to power in 2018, had promised free, fair and democratic elections in 2020.

The elections were scheduled for August 29 but the election commission deferred them indefinitely after the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic. The tenure of both the parliament and Abiy—which was due to expire in October—was then extended. —AFP

News in brief

COVID vaccine in France

PARIS: France's first doses of the Pfizer-BioNTech coronavirus vaccine were delivered early yesterday to the Paris hospital system's central pharmacy outside the capital, an AFP journalist saw. After more than 62,000 COVID-19 deaths in France, shots are set to begin with people in two elderly care homes today, the same day the rest of the EU begins injections. A refrigerated truck brought the roughly 19,500 doses from the Pfizer factory in Puurs, northeast Belgium, to Paris, the capital's APHP hospital authority said, with pharmacy chief Franck Huet calling it a "historic" moment in the pandemic. After repackaging in Paris, the vaccines will be delivered to a long-term care unit at a hospital in Sevran, outside the capital, and an old-age care home in Dijon, in eastern France. — AFP

Russia tops 3 million infections

MOSCOW: Russia yesterday passed three million confirmed coronavirus infections, as authorities hold out against reimposing a national lockdown while the country is battered by a second wave. Official figures showed that a total of 3,021,964 cases have been detected, with 54,226 deaths. In the past 24 hours, 29,258 new infections and 567 deaths were registered in Russia, fourth on the list of hardest-hit countries worldwide. Since winter began, each week has brought new records for new cases and deaths, with epicenters in capital Moscow and second-largest city Saint Petersburg. — AFP

Spain receives first vaccine doses

MADRID: Spain received its first doses of the Pfizer-BioNTech coronavirus vaccine yesterday, a day before the country is set to begin its immunization campaign. A refrigerated truck arrived at Pfizer's warehouse in Guadalajara in central Spain with the shipment, three days after it left the company's factory in Puurs in northeast Belgium, the health ministry said in a statement. After repackaging, the vaccines will be redistributed to Spain's 17 autonomous regions so that vaccination can begin across the country as planned on Sunday, it added. Spain will receive 4.5 million Pfizer vaccine doses over the next 12 weeks, enough to vaccinate some 2.3 million people, according to the ministry. — AFP

Licorice can cure COVID

ASHGABAT: Well-known for his baffling botanical pronouncements, Turkmenistan's President Gurbanguly Berdimukhamedov claimed yesterday that licorice could cure coronavirus, the latest supposed miracle cure in a country still claiming zero cases. "Scientists from every country are looking for effective cures, running various studies, and one of them could be licorice root," the leader of the authoritarian ex-Soviet country told ministers. Without citing any scientific evidence, former dentist Berdimukhamedov claimed that "licorice stops the coronavirus from developing" and "even a weak concentration of a water-based extract has a neutralizing effect." Turkmenistan has "sufficient reserves" of licorice, he added, ordering the national academy of sciences to study the plant's supposed health effects. — AFP

Indian PM makes fresh appeal to farmers

NEW DELHI: Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday offered to hold fresh talks to end a stalemate over new agricultural reforms, in his latest push to win over farmers protesting for almost a month against the move.

Tens of thousands of farmers have been camping out near several entry points to New Delhi since November 26 against three new laws they say will lead to dismantling of regulated markets.

They also fear the government would stop buying wheat and rice at guaranteed prices, leaving them at the mercy of big corporates. In a speech beamed live to millions of farmers across the country, Modi sought to allay their misgivings, insisting the laws, passed in September, would give

them the freedom to sell their produce "anywhere and to anyone they like".

"Lies are being spread that the local mandis (markets) will shut down, the minimum support price will be stopped... don't be misguided by those having political motives," Modi said. "I am saying this with humility that we are ready to discuss every issue of the farmers, even with those (political parties) who are against us, for the sake of our farmers."

Modi also released \$2.5 billion to 90 million farmers under a financial scheme that his party launched last year. Under the direct cash transfer scheme, small farmers get 6,000 rupees (\$82) in four instalments in a year.

Modi also interacted with seven farmers from different states via a video conference in which they praised the government's various farm schemes. Agriculture employs about 70 percent of India's 1.3 billion people and accounts for 15 percent of its \$2.7 trillion economy.

But in recent decades farm incomes have stagnated, and experts

Russia says intercepted IS attack plot

MOSCOW: Russia's FSB security service said yesterday it had foiled an attack planned by a cell loyal to the Islamic State (IS) jihadist group in the country's unstable southern republic of Dagestan, arresting four people. "Members of the group

planned to detonate an explosive close to an administrative building belonging to security services, followed by an armed attack against interior ministry employees" in regional capital Makhachkala, the FSB said in a statement.

As well as arresting four "members of the international IS terrorist group", investigators found "firearms and bladed weapons, a large amount of ammunition and an explosive device", it added, along with mobile phones containing "exchanges with organizers located abroad".

On December 17, police killed two attackers targeting security forces in Russia's neighboring

republic of Chechnya. Six people were also killed during an October "counter-terrorism" operation in Chechnyan capital Grozny, including two members of the security forces.

Russia's territories in the Caucasus were ravaged by two wars between federal troops and Chechen separatists in the 1990s and 2000s. Increasingly Islamist in character, the insurgency spread to other republics in the region and declared allegiance to IS in 2015. While the jihadist group's influence remains limited, occasional attacks against the authorities persist in Chechnya, Dagestan and neighboring Ingushetia. — AFP

HK 'speedboat fugitives' to face trial in China

HONG KONG: Ten of 12 Hong Kong pro-democracy activists arrested as they tried to flee the territory by speedboat to Taiwan will face trial in mainland China on December 28, campaigners and family members said Friday. Relatives of the detainees have been told by Chinese government-appointed lawyers that a video hearing will take place Monday afternoon at Yantian District People's Court in the southern city of Shenzhen, according to

the Save 12 HK Youths campaign.

China has a history of putting on trial dissidents around the Christmas and New Year period to avoid Western scrutiny. In a video hearing, defendants appear from the detention centre instead of going to court, explained Lu Siwei, a mainland Chinese human rights lawyer working on the case despite a ban and threats from the authorities.

Families of the detainees called on mainland authorities to live broadcast the trial, as they are unlikely to be able to attend given Shenzhen's current COVID-19 quarantine requirements, and to allow their representatives, lawyers, reporters and diplomats to be present at the proceedings. — AFP



LONDON: Pro-democracy activists take part in a 'Save 12 HK Youths' rally at Potters Fields Park beside Tower Bridge in London. — AFP



NEW DELHI: This handout photograph taken on Friday and released by the Indian Press Information Bureau (PIB), shows Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi releasing the next instalment of financial benefit under PM Kisan Samman Nidhi through video conference in New Delhi. — AFP

say the sector badly needs investment and modernization. Farmer unions have demanded a total repeal of the laws and warned of a bigger agitation

if their demands are not met. Several rounds of talks between ministers and farmer leaders have failed to produce a breakthrough so far. — AFP

Recruitment open day!

Reaching out to all jobseekers in Kuwait for the following positions

An ISO-certified company operating engineering, operations and maintenance activities in industrial sectors with enormous potential for growth wishes to recruit relevant experienced persons for the following positions:

- **Mechanical Helper:** Should have experience in industrial plants of a minimum of 5 years.
- **Pipe Fabricator:** Fabrication of pipes, plates and structures for mechanical projects with minimum 10 years of experience.
- **Pipefitter:** Installation and repair works of various grades of pipes such as carbon, steel, alloy steel, etc with minimum 5 years of experience.
- **Arc Welder:** Carry out all kinds of welding activities of pipes, plates and structures.
- **Hydro Jetter:** Carry out high-pressure hydro jetting with a maximum pressure of 500 bar with a minimum of 5 years of experience.
- **Plasterer/ Painter:** Should have experience in blasting tanks, piping and structures using sand, grit and garnet. Experience in spray/brush/painting of tanks, piping and structures, with minimum 5 years of experience.
- **Auto mechanic:** Experience in troubleshooting earthmoving equipment, all types of LD and HD vehicles, air compressors, generators, etc. Capable to carry out all types of maintenance/repair/overhauling jobs independently.

Interested candidates are requested to bring the following documents during the interview (qualification, experience certificate, passport copy, civil ID copy, work permit copy, authorized signatory page copy). Candidates must have valid transferable residencies.

Walk-in interview on Wednesday and Thursday December 30 - 31, 2020 from 9:00 am to 4:00 pm
Location: Farwaniya, block 6, building 288

Contact no.: 60907825